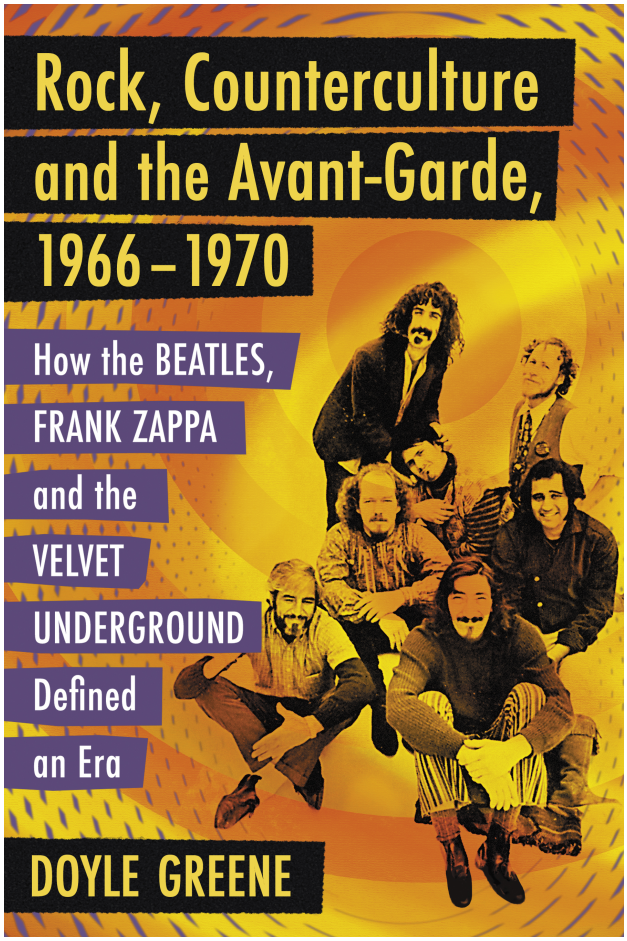
# Rock, Counterculture and the Avant-Garde, 1966–1970

## How the BEATLES, FRANK ZAPPA and the VELVET UNDERGROUND Defined an Era

DOYLE GREENE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# Rock, Counterculture and the Avant-Garde, 1966–1970

*How the Beatles, Frank Zappa and the Velvet Underground Defined an Era*

Doyle Greene

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Front cover: 1967 publicity photograph of Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention (Photofest)

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For Max Bassinson

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# Preface

This book focuses on the Beatles, Frank Zappa, and the Velvet Underground from 1966 to 1970, concentrating on the Beatles' later years, Zappa's work with the original line-up of the Mothers of Invention and his early solo albums, and the course of the Velvets' career trajectory. In related discussion, it examines John Lennon's collaborations with Yoko Ono, the Zappa-produced album *Trout Mask Replica* by Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band, and *The Marble Index*, an album by former Velvets vocalist Nico which featured extensive contributions from another ex-Velvets member, multi-instrumentalist John Cale. While organized chronologically and around album releases, the textual analysis ranges from specific songs, cover art, methods of concert performance, work in other mediums (television in particular), and off-stage performances. Moreover, these texts are read within a historical context in order to examine how these performers negotiated rock music, the avant-garde, and the counterculture movement amid the political upheaval of the late 1960s.

In developing this project, it became a case where research determined the topic and not the other way around. As a teen in the 1970s, my preferred brands of rock music always tended towards art rock—or, use a term with more critical panache, "avant-rock"—namely progressive rock bands from the early 1970s and post-punk bands by the late 1970s. Another way to put it is that during the 1970s I went from buying anything released on Virgin Records to anything released on Rough Trade Records. As my critical interest within the overall terrain of cultural studies moved further into popular music (and probably the nostalgia factor as well), I intermittently considered potential projects on prog rock, post-punk, and even a genealogy of art rock from prog rock to post-punk.

Three issues eventually emerged. One was covering some of that ground in my previous books *Teens, TV and Tunes: The Manufacturing of American Adolescent Culture* (2012) and *The Rock Cover Song: Culture, History, Politics* (2014). Second was establishing workable parameters. Books

exhaustively focusing on a specific band or album risk becoming redundant and, at worst, can veer into fan mail disguised as critical engagement. Books assessing an entire musical genre and/or historical era—well-defined or not—can attempt to cover too much and short shrift the topic(s). I attempted to construct some sort of middle-ground as far as providing comparative analysis of selected but relevant case studies within a specific time-frame. The third issue became adequately contextualizing any project pertaining to prog rock, punk/post-punk, or some combination of the two necessitated examining rock music in the latter half of the 1960s. What began as developing a historical background became the central area of investigation. Moreover, the late 1960s were not only a crucial era of political unrest but a pivotal point in the constantly changing relationship between the avant-garde and popular culture. While I explored this area in *Politics and the American Television Comedy: A Critical Survey from* I Love Lucy *through* South Park (2008), rock music as much as TV stood out as an equally important convergence point.

Nevertheless, potential case studies inevitably needed to be whittled down as well. My first criterion was focusing on performers with name recognition, which entailed omitting lesser-known bands like the Monks, Red Krayola, Silver Apples, and United States of America. A second was excluding bands with more tenuous links to the avant-garde *per se*, such as the Doors, the Grateful Dead, MC5, the Nice, or 13th Floor Elevators. A third criteria involved performers whose careers did not cover a wide span of the late 1960s, such as the Stooges, Can, or King Crimson—all of whom released their debut albums in 1969. As the case studies developed, I came to the decision that, as modern architect Ludwig Miles van der Rohe put it, "less is more." The focus narrowed to the Beatles, Zappa, and the Velvets. Despite some chagrin, as far as extended case studies I made final omissions of Pink Floyd and Soft Machine and consolidated discussion of Yoko Ono, Captain Beefheart, and Nico within the respective sections on the Beatles, Zappa, and the Velvets.

Ironically, I've never been a devoted fan of the Beatles, Zappa, or the Velvet Underground and I never had the proverbial "it changed my life" moment when I first heard them. By way of disclaimer, Captain Beefheart's *Trout Mask Replica* was a revelatory album when I first heard it in the late 1970s

and admittedly included for some purely personal reasons; however, *TMR* also merits discussion in the context of Zappa's early career as well as being an avant-rock landmark in its own right—nor is it immune to criticism. Ultimately, one additional factor in determining the focus of this book was (hopefully) a sense of critical distance regarding the Beatles, Zappa, and the Velvets that may well have been lacking with longer case studies of Captain Beefheart or Soft Machine. I believe criticism functions best as with productive analysis and less so as passionate judgment for or against the object of study.

In order to textually analyze the music with some degree of accuracy I variously consulted sheet music, guitar tabulations, YouTube tutorials, and playing along to songs on bass guitar. While discrepancies emerged, any errors in musical transcription are the ultimately the responsibility of the author and not the sources consulted. I also drew on my practical experience as a musician recording and playing live over the course of the 1980s and 1990s to consider the mechanics of musical production by electronic instruments, effects equipment, and the studio. Above all, and as encyclopedic as I once thought my knowledge was, I've come to realize there are still numerous gaps in my understanding of music history and this project became part of my own education process. The reader is invited to use it as they see fit for their own ends.

# Introduction

## *Pop Goes the Avant-Garde*

### *The Status of the Avant-Garde*

In 2013, the death of Velvet Underground co-founder Lou Reed generated a wave of critical discourse regarding rock music's complicated relationship with the avant-garde—although it seemed more intent on simplifying the matter through historical revisionism. CNN hailed Reed as "the minimalist god" and the Velvets as "precursors to punk rock, art rock, avant-garde rock, almost any kind of rock that veered from the status quo."[1] As part of *Rolling Stone*'s coverage of Reed's death, David Fricke stated the Velvets were "the most misunderstood and prophetic band of [the Sixties] in their fusion of severe avant-garde drive and Reed's frank, gripping songcraft."[2] Writing for *The Guardian*, Suzanne Moore's eulogy bore the none-too-subtle title "Postmodernism Killed the Avant-Garde. Lady Gaga is No Substitute for Lou Reed" and mourned that "Reed's death has hit my generation because his presence anchored us into a time and place when the avant-garde was still meaningful…. A man whose cultural value exceeded his commercial value. There is not much of this anymore."[3]

With all due respect to Lou Reed, I do not necessarily share Moore's assessment that Reed signified "a time and a place when the avant-garde was still meaningful" yet alone her claim that "postmodernism killed the avant-garde." Rather, Moore's assessment betrays an all-too-common bias in cultural criticism: a given critic's generation was the *last* generation whose cultural signifiers were "meaningful" artistically and politically whereas subsequent generations have only produced so much mass culture drivel. This is *not* suggesting the avant-garde ceased to be "meaningful" in the 1960s. A central argument of this project is the extent the late 1960s became a crucial historical moment where the avant-garde, popular culture, counterculture, and rock music converged in myriad ways. What is

increasingly forgotten is the extent cultural commentators began writing the avant-garde's obituary during and since the 1960s, with the primary problem being mainstream acceptance as opposed to artistic exhaustion. In 1967, Irving Howe claimed "in the war between modernist culture and bourgeois society something has happened that no spokesman for the *avant-garde* quite anticipated … the middle class had discovered that the fiercest attacks upon its values can be transported into pleasing entertainments."[4] Three decades later, Matei Calinescu reiterated this view. "In the post–World War II period, with the unexpectedly large public success of the avant-garde…. Its offensive, insulting rhetoric came to be regarded as merely amusing, and its apocalyptic outcries were changed into comfortable and innocuous clichés."[5] In *The End of the American Avant-Garde* (1997), Stuart D. Hobbs argued the avant-garde's alleged demise in the 1960s not only resulted from its commodification into mass culture but two additional factors: one, a Cold War political climate and left-wing disillusionment with Soviet Communism that entailed a political shift more sympathetic with liberal-democratic ideology (individuality, non-conformity, plurality); second, the intellectual and institutional acceptance of the avant-garde into the terrain of academia and museums.[6] In short, the avant-garde not only became a product in bourgeois culture, but a producer of bourgeois ideology.

One of the most influential "death of the avant-garde" critiques remains Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974). Differentiating the "historical avant-garde" of the post–World War I era and the "neo-avant-garde" of the post–World War II/Cold War era, Bürger contended "the neo-avant-garde institutionalizes the *avant-garde as art*.... It is the status of their products, not the consciousness artists have of their activity, that defines the social effects of their works…. Which means it negates the intention of returning art to the praxis of life."[7] One might say the neo-avant-garde became "anti-art for art's sake" devoid of the historical avant-garde's confrontational *raison d'être*. Writing in 1971, William L. O'Neill claimed "whereas Dada was based on outrage, both given and received, happenings tended towards the merely cute…. Like the happenings, pop [art] was Dada without the rage or politics."[8]

This neo-avant-garde has also been classified as an overall shift from modernism to postmodernism, although any neat categorization and periodization proves difficult. In *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Fredric Jameson avoided using the term "death of the avant-garde" while suggesting modernism reached its limits during the 1960s and gave way to postmodernism by the 1970s.

> Abstract expressionism in painting, existentialism in philosophy, the final forms of representation in the novel, the films of the great *auteurs*, or the modernist school of poetry … are now all seen as the final, extraordinary flowering of a high-modernist impulse which is spent and exhausted with them. The enumeration of what follows, then, at once becomes empirical, chaotic, and heterogeneous: Andy Warhol and pop art, but also photorealism, and … "new expressionism"; the moment, in music, of John Cage but also the synthesis of classical and "popular" styles found in composers like Phil Glass and Terry Riley, and also punk and new wave (the Beatles and the Stones now standing as the high-modernist moment of that more recent and rapidly evolving tradition); in film, Godard, post–Godard, and experimental cinema and video…. Burroughs, Pynchon, or Ishmael Reed, on the one hand, and the French *nouveau roman* and its succession, on the other.[9]

For the purposes of introduction, Jameson offers a productive entry point to assess the 20th century avant-garde as the transitions from Max Ernst to Andy Warhol, Pablo Picasso to Jackson Pollack, T.S. Eliot to Allen Ginsberg, James Joyce to William S. Burroughs, Bertolt Brecht to Samuel Beckett, Arnold Schoenberg to John Cage, and Sergei Eisenstein to Jean-Luc Godard.

Setting aside his oft-cited critique of postmodernism as pastiche and "blank parody" for later discussion, Jameson's periodization truncates rock music around the "high-modernist moment" of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones versus the "postmodernism" of punk and new wave. If pursued to an overly general historicism, the 1960s become the "modernist" moment of rock, the 1970s and beyond the "postmodern" moment of rock, and by implication the 1950s become rock's "pre-modern" moment.[10] In this schema, Elvis

Presley, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Little Richard, and Jerry Lee Lewis were pre-modernist; John Lennon, Mick Jagger, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, and Frank Zappa were modernist; and everyone since was postmodernist: David Bowie, Johnny Rotten, Bruce Springsteen, Bono, or Kurt Cobain.[11] This results in Suzanne Moore's insistence that "Lou Reed was avant-garde precisely because he came out of modernism…. His loss resonates because we can vaguely recall a time when not everything had been subsumed by the market."[12] Hence, Moore sustains two myths generated around an "authentic" avant-garde. One, it is "modernist" and *not* "postmodernist." Second, culture designated as "avant-garde" ostensibly remains outside the realm of the consumer marketplace: the domain of mass culture and the culture industry.

To be sure, using the term "avant-garde" in the twenty-first century often becomes an exercise in how Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart defined hardcore pornography: "I know it when I see it." "Avant-garde" is now used to describe anything from advertising strategies, automobile accessories, culinary trends, fashion designs, television shows, and video games. In terms of contemporary popular music, "avant-garde" is applied to everything from the glam-pop of Lady Gaga to the alternative rock of Arcade Fire to the discordant avant-punk of Sonic Youth to the merciless noise assaults of Merzbow. In this regard, it is necessary to offer some working definitions of key terms used in this project. Drawing on the theories of Michael Nyman, Paul Hegarty constructed a distinction between "avant-garde music" and "experimental music."[13] Avant-garde music is defined around *dissonance*, specifically 12-tone music and the work of Arnold Schoenberg; it can also encompass Henry Cowell's piano pieces, the orchestral works of Iannis Xenakis, the free jazz of the Ornette Coleman Quartet, or the brilliantly "incompetent" folk-pop of the Shaggs' *Philosophy of the World* (1969).[14] In short, avant-garde music is produced by conventional instrumentation playing outside the constraints of tonality and one could add meter, namely the 4/4 norm of popular music (i.e., the beat). Experimental music is defined around *noise*, epitomized by John Cage and the role of "non-musical" means of musical production. Cage composed pieces for a toy piano (*Suite for Toy Piano*, 1948), a dozen radios (*Imaginary Landscape No. 4*, 1951), or most famously *4'33"* (1952) in which the performer(s)—usually a solo pianist—appear onstage without

playing a note for four-and-a-half minutes and the musical performance becomes the random sounds generated within the concert space during that time span. If one attends a concert performance of Handel's *Messiah*, the sound of a cell phone ringing in the audience becomes a highly irritating and unwanted intrusion of "noise" within the music. In the case of *4'33"* a cell phone ringing may well be the "musical" highlight of the performance.

Hegarty conceded, "The distinction … could easily be deconstructed…. [It] occurs *after*, or in the light of Nyman's distinction, and applies retrospectively."[15] In other words, this distinction is one of *historical differentiation* as much as an *aesthetic difference* between dissonance and noise, the former being expressed as "wrong notes" and the latter expressed by "wrong sounds" within the cultural constructs of Western music. Yet there is also considerable interaction between the two. Edgard Varèse's *Ionisation* (1929–31)—a piece that greatly influenced Frank Zappa's musical outlook—consists of thirteen percussionists and includes anvils and electric sirens along with glockenspiel and tubular bells. Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Kontakte for Electronic Sounds, Piano, and Percussion* (1959–60) combined the dissonance of a piano playing highly atonal patterns and the noise of percussion and electronic sounds, including electronic effects on the instruments. In this regard, avant-grade music and experimental music are both specific categories yet frequently overlap. This project primarily uses the term "avant-garde/experimental music" in terms of how rock bands in the late 1960s often utilized both dissonance and noise as compositional and performance strategies for political as well as artistic purposes. Moreover, rock bands incorporated elements of the avant-garde in lyrical content, studio recording, concert performances, cover art, and even promotional material. The problem for critics decrying the death of the avant-garde due to any mainstream assimilation remains the extent they lament the decline of the "cult value" increasingly invested in the avant-garde as artistic product for select consumers rather than its "exhibition-value" in mass social praxis and protest.[16] As Hubert van den Berg observed, "The two peaks in aesthetic avant-garde coincide with the revolutionary period in the wake of the First World War and the protest movements of 1968, in which several aesthetic avant-garde movements participated themselves."[17]

There is also an economic distinction to be made between popular music and avant-garde/experimental music. In *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1977), Jacques Attali used the terms "mass music" and "theoretical music." For the purposes of this project, "mass music" can be read as synonymous with "popular music" as can "theoretical music" with "avant-garde/experimental music." However, Attali situated them as existing in a tense relationship rather than a strict dichotomy.

> The link-up of these two productions may seem a priori artificial: One uses the most traditional of harmonies to avoid startling anyone, while the other … refuses to accept the dominant trends and cultural codes. One addresses itself to a mass audience with the aim of inciting to buy [while] the other has no market or financial base…. Yet both belong to the same reality, that of hyperindustrialized Western society in crisis. They are both linked together, if only by virtue of being radical opposites. In fact, their interlinkage is much more solid than this simple antithesis implies: theoretical music and mass music both relate to a repetitive image of Western society.[18]

Attali's analysis of the relationship between mass music and theoretical music entails their respective roles in the marketplace of culture. Mass music is commercial music, easily consumable and equally pleasing to the listeners' ears as well as the record companies' profit margins. Theoretical music is uncommercial music, difficult listening—sometimes extraordinarily so—that often annoys and upsets many listeners and consequently does not ship many units. As far as "worth," when pushed to its limits the binary suggests mass music only has commercial value and theoretical music only has cultural value; to put it another way, mass music generates economic capital and theoretical music generates cultural capital. However, as much as the avant-garde is positioned by its participants—artists, critics, audience—as "outside" or "opposed" to the system it is inherently part of it. The theoretical music of Milton Babbitt is as much under the umbrella of capitalist culture as the mass music of Justin Bieber. The potential rupture occurs when the "cultural value" of a Milton Babbitt might impact popular culture as much as the "commercial value" of a Justin Bieber—or, for that matter, when the Beatles, Frank Zappa, and the Velvet Underground generate *both* commercial and cultural value.

***"Avant-Rock" in the Late 1960s***

Part One concentrates on the Beatles, and it is not a stretch to suggest the Beatles were the most important band in the history of rock music. Chapter 1 focuses on *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. By 1967, Beatlemania was a global cultural phenomenon. As well as branching out into cinema with *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and *Help!* (1965), the Beatles pushed the boundaries of rock and roll formalism by incorporating the influences of Indian, classical, and avant-garde/experimental music on *Rubber Soul* (1965) and especially *Revolver* (1966). Following a decision to abandon live performances, the Beatles undertook *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967), a "concept album" that rebranded the Beatles from their mop-top popstar image into counterculture icons and modernist artists. As part of this process, *Sgt. Pepper* maximized the potentialities of studio composition (effects, overdubbing, session musicians, etc.) with no intention or interest in replicating the songs in concert. This chapter focuses on three songs from *Sgt. Pepper*—"She's Leaving Home," "Good Morning Good Morning" and "A Day in the Life"—in terms of how they negotiated mass music and theoretical music and also signaled a growing distinction between "Lennon songs" and "McCartney songs" politically as well as musically.

Chapter 2 examines the Beatles' attempts to provide an alternative means of performance and promotion of new songs through television rather than live concerts. Several "promotional films"—what would now be called "music videos"—were made by the band for songs and aired on programs ranging from *The Ed Sullivan Show* to *Top of the Pops*. This culminated in a conceptual, avant-garde promotional film housing several songs, the ill-conceived and poorly received BBC special *Magical Mystery Tour* (1967). Despite *MMT* being an artistic misfire as far as a cinematic exercise, the accompanying soundtrack of *MMT* demonstrated further musical experimentation as well as a growing musical divide between Lennon and McCartney. Case studies include McCartney's "Penny Lane" and Lennon's "All You Need Is Love," both of which were singles re-released on the U.S. album version of *MMT* and accompanied by promotional films, as well as

McCartney's "Your Mother Should Know" versus Lennon's "I Am the Walrus" from the *MMT* TV special.

Chapter 3 examines the establishment of Apple Corps as the Beatles' idealistic attempt to construct an alternate system of cultural production and consumption, specifically the formation of Apple Records as a label providing access for myriad musicians into the recording industry. The first Beatles' album released on the new label was *The Beatles* (a.k.a. *The White Album,* 1968), an expansive double record marked by antagonistic working relationships and divergent musical directions that nearly ended the band altogether. *The White Album* also represented a distinct musical break from previous records and further exacerbated the Lennon vs. McCartney schism through stylistic fragmentation, the use of numerous genres, and an increased emphasis on parody. This chapter examines how American folk and blues genres were utilized musically and politically, the former with McCartney's "Rocky Raccoon" and Lennon's "The Continuing Story of Bungalow Bill" and the latter with McCartney's "Why Don't We Do It in the Road?" and Lennon's "Yer Blues." It also provides an analysis of *The White Album*'s "political music" through considering the opening track, McCartney's Chuck Berry/Beach Boys parody "Back in the U.S.S.R." and the closing tracks, Lennon's *musique concrète* piece "Revolution 9," and attending MOR satire "Good Night." Additionally, it compares and contrasts *The White Album* version of Lennon's "Revolution 1" to the single version "Revolution" along with the modified version done for the "Revolution" promotional film.

Chapter 4 examines John Lennon's break from the Beatles in the wake of *The White Album* and the establishment of Apple Records through his avant-garde/experimental music projects and strident political activism, both in collaboration with Yoko Ono. Released in late 1968, *Unfinished Music No. 1: Two Virgins* was an album of largely improvised avant-garde/experimental music and the album cover—a full-frontal nude photo of Lennon and Yoko—provoked considerable controversy and immense problems for the fledgling Apple Records. Over the course of 1969, Lennon self-consciously rebranded himself as the Beatle representing the revolutionary consciousness and avant-garde aesthetic of the band with further recorded collaborations with Ono (*Unfinished Music No.2: Life with*

*the Lions* and *Wedding Album*). The two also engaged in a public relations mission to "sell peace" throughout the world by staging two Bed-In for Peace campaigns and appearing on talk-shows. As important, in the summer of 1969 Lennon released his first solo single, the anti-war folk anthem "Give Peace a Chance" as the Plastic Ono Band; by fall of 1969, the Plastic Ono Band became as a working ensemble integrating stripped-down rock with avant-garde concepts. Lennon soon after privately quit the Beatles.

Chapter 5 considers the protracted break-up of the Beatles. In the wake of the tumultuous *White Album*, the planned follow-up in early 1969 was a "back to basics" live album/concert film of new material with a "behind the scenes" TV special chronicling the rehearsal process. What became known as the *Get Back* project quickly collapsed into acrimony and effectively signaled the demise of the band. While the Beatles sporadically reassembled long enough to complete *Abbey Road* (1969) as an unofficial farewell album, Lennon's subsequent departure from the band and the Beatles' dissolution was kept secret amid contract renegotiations between Apple and EMI/Capitol, the recent release of *Abbey Road*, and resurrection of the *Get Back* project in that United Artists deemed the Beatles' minimal involvement on the animated film *Yellow Submarine* insufficient to fulfill their film contract with the studio. This resulted in the film *Let It Be* (1970) and an accompanying album of the same name, with legendary producer Phil Spector hired to salvage the recorded material into releasable product. McCartney was livid at Spector's production excesses, specifically the syrupy orchestration on his song "The Long and Winding Road." In a press release coinciding with the release of his debut solo album, McCartney unexpectedly announced *he* was leaving the Beatles in April of 1970. Ultimately, this chapter considers how the Beatles' later years generated in the subsequent "myths"—rightly or wrongly—constructed around Lennon and McCartney: Lennon the revolutionary rock avant-gardist and McCartney the apolitical pop commercialist.

Part Two examines the Mothers of Invention, which effectively amounts to a discussion of Frank Zappa's early career. By his early twenties, Zappa was a working musician and composer in both popular music and avant-garde/experimental music, and Chapter 6 contextualizes the Mothers by

considering Zappa's work ca. 1963 in terms of his parodic popular music releases ("Grunion Run" and "Memories of El Monte") as well as his humorous but more reverential approach to avant-garde/experimental music (*Improvised Concerto for Two Bicycles, Prerecorded Tape, and the Musicians in the Back* performed on *The Steve Allen Show*). Zappa initially treated popular music and avant-garde/experimental music as exclusive territories: the former as money-making product and the latter as serious art. The degree Zappa retained the view that popular music amounted to inane "mass music" that only had commercial value and avant-garde/experimental music as respectable "theoretical music" that only had cultural value became the tension underscoring Zappa's entire career.

Chapter 7 focuses on the formation of the Mothers of Invention and their debut album *Freak Out!* (1966) on which Zappa combined popular music forms like rock, R&B, doo-wop, and jazz with avant-garde/experimental music influences such as John Cage, Igor Stravinsky, and Edgard Varèse. Not only one rock's first "studio albums" as far as Zappa's predilection for studio composition, particularly the extensive use of tape editing and electronic effects, it was also one of rock's initial "concept albums" that Zappa conceived as a wide-ranging musical documentary/satire of the emerging Los Angeles counterculture. However, *Freak Out!* tended towards parodic but relatively straightforward rock songs and unfocused avant-garde musical experiments, representing a formative example of what Zappa more effectively executed on subsequent albums. Particular attention is paid to the pop parody "Wowie Zowie," the avant-rock of "Who Are the Brain Police?" and "Help I'm a Rock," and the longest, most experimental track, "The Return of the Son of Monster Magnet." The social commentary lyrics of *Freak Out!* also indicated Zappa's tendency to attack what he perceived as dim-witted individuals rather than determining social formations for the problems of mass society; not unrelated, *Freak Out!* introduced "Suzy Creamcheese," a recurring character who appeared on the Mothers' albums throughout the late 1960s as Zappa's all-purpose symbol of "feminine" mass cultural-societal conformity.

Chapter 8 examines *Absolutely Free* (1967), the first album in which the trademark Zappa style emerged. As well as expanding the Mothers' line-up to include woodwinds, keyboards, and two drummers, the results yielded a

highly complex, technically demanding music drawing from numerous genres matched by highly satirical and sophomoric lyrics castigating the entire political spectrum. Discussion focuses on "Plastic People," "Son of Suzy Creamcheese," "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," and "America Drinks Up and Goes Home." As far as social criticism, underneath the ostensible anti–Establishment vitriol *Absolutely Free* demonstrated a consistency with a counterculture political-psychoanalytic world-view that situated sexual repression as the taproot of authoritarianism, deemed the conformity and consumerism in mass society a "feminine" impetus, and engaged in increasingly crude representations of women and sex. Moreover, the Mothers' unleashed their brand of "rock theater" during their run at the Garrick Theater in New York City through spring and summer of 1967. The Mothers pushed the concert experience into the domain of Dadaistic "anti-concert" comedy with audience participation (read: humiliation), extended musical improvisation, and theatrical elements like props and skits—usually entailing a great deal of offensiveness—operating in tandem with the musical performance.

Chapter 9 discusses *We're Only in It for the Money* (1968), Zappa's musical and lyrical broadside against the counterculture and, more specifically, a riposte to the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. While the Beatles moved into parody of numerous musical genres on *The White Album*, *Money* acerbically parodied the conventions and clichés of late 1960s rock music on songs like "Absolutely Free," and "Let's Make the Water Turn Black," assailed the naivety and trendiness of the counterculture on "Who Needs the Peace Corps?" and "Flower Punk," attacked the Establishment with equal venom on "Concentration Moon" and "Mom and Dad," and closed with the avant-garde/experimental piece "The Chrome Plated Megaphone of Destiny." This chapter also examines Zappa as a social commentator, and how his equal contempt for liberals and conservatives not only stemmed from being an equally opportunity satirist, but his "practical conservative" ideology that embraced capitalism and individuality while rejecting hippie community as well as square morality.

Chapter 10 explores what Zappa termed his "Project/Object" method by which any particular aspect of his work served as a "project" that could be used or reused in a larger conceptual work defined as an "object." *Money*

became the second album of a four album cycle Zappa dubbed "No Commercial Potential." The first was Zappa's debut solo album *Lumpy Gravy* (1967), an album of instrumental music that eclectically combined numerous and often incongruent genres as well as dialog tracks recorded during the *Money* session, while the third was *Cruising with Ruben & the Jets* (1968), an album of doo-wop satires which included rerecorded songs from *Freak Out!* The fourth and final installment of "No Commercial Potential" was *Uncle Meat* (1969), a sprawling double album of studio and concert recordings ranging from complex instrumentals, avant-rock social commentary, dialog tracks, and genre parody.

Coinciding with "No Commercial Potential," Zappa formed Bizarre Productions, an umbrella company that included two record labels, a music publishing house, and an advertising firm to promote his and other performers' work on his record companies. In this context, Chapter 10 also examines Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band's *Trout Mask Replica* (1969), a now-legendary avant-rock album that captured Beefheart's assemblage of blues, free jazz and surrealist lyrics at peak efficiency and intensity; it was produced by Zappa and released on his label Straight Records. After disbanding the original Mothers line-up in 1969, Zappa released two solo albums, *Hot Rats* (1969) and *Chunga's Revenge* (1970), as well as two posthumous Mothers of Invention albums, *Burnt Weeny Sandwich* (1970) and *Weasels Ripped My Flesh* (1970) culled from studio and live recordings from 1967 to 1969. The sheer amount of "product"—a term Zappa himself frequently used to describe his prodigious musical output—issued around the Project/Object philosophy entailed a "self-referential" cannibalizing and recycling of pre-existing material across Zappa's career that sounded like Zappa was, sometimes literally, repeating himself. The irony was that Zappa's parodic eclecticism became a signature style that increasingly developed uniformity, if not redundancy, in musical form and lyrical content. "Peaches en Regalia" (*Hot Rats*) and "My Guitar Wants to Kill Your Mama" (*Weasels*) are discussed as respective and representative examples of the "Zappa rock instrumental" and the "Zappa rock song-with-vocals."

Part Three focuses on the Velvet Underground, now considered one of rock's most influential bands. Chapter 11 discusses the Velvets' formation

ca. 1965 by Lou Reed and John Cale as they consciously assembled popular music genres (rock, pop, folk) with elements of avant-garde/experimental music (dissonance, minimalism, noise) while the lyrics candidly delved into topics like drug addiction and alternate sexual practices. It also examines the Velvets' early years with Andy Warhol as part of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable—a performance unit incorporating dancers, films, lights, and slides that pioneered the multi-media rock concert—as well as their momentous 1967 debut album *The Velvet Underground and Nico* "produced" by Warhol. Especially during Nico's brief tenure as a second lead vocalist, the Velvets' repertoire of songs could range from highly accessible rock with folk, pop, and psychedelic leanings to determinedly inaccessible avant-garde/experimental noise assaults. In this respect, *The VU and Nico* is not a "consistent" album as far as establishing a cohesive band sound, with three of the more famous songs from the album discussed: "Heroin," "Venus in Furs," and "All Tomorrow's Parties."

By 1967, the Velvets parted ways with Warhol, the EPI, and Nico. In returning to their original quartet formation they produced the formidable *White Light/White Heat* (1968), the focus of Chapter 12. A brutal exercise in avant-rock minimalism, *WL/WH* largely eschewed balladry in favor of grinding rock songs utilizing limited chord changes, repetition of simple riffs, metronomic drumming, and a pronounced use of dissonance and noise generated through distortion and free performance rather than studio manipulations. While all six songs on *WL/WH* are considered to varying degrees, the album was epitomized by "Sister Ray," a *seventeen*-plus minute song that lyrically addressed intravenous drug use, gender-bending, group sex, and homosexuality against a backdrop of a two-bar/three-chord riff, little variation in meter (which is not to say "tempo"), extended free improvisation, and extensive use of dissonance and noise (both intended and aleatory).

Following *WL/WH*, John Cale was forced out of the Velvets, and Chapter 13 considers the final two Velvets' albums *The Velvet Underground* (1969) and *Loaded* (1970).[19] It was not coincidental the departure of Cale saw the Velvets move into much more accessible and overtly commercial rock music. Indeed, *The Velvet Underground* was dominated by spacious, melodic ballads with the exception of "The Murder Mystery," an avant-

garde piece notable for its incongruent "slow-fast" sections, astringently discordant coda, and overlapping vocal tracks singing different lyrics. *Loaded* was straightforward rock and roll that abandoned avant-garde/experimental music altogether, yet also an album that defined the Velvets as a seminal "proto-punk" through the songs "Sweet Jane" and "Rock and Roll." By way of comparison, this chapter considers *The Marble Index* (1968), Nico's second solo album recorded with extensive contributions from John Cale and released between *WL/WH* and *The Velvet Underground*. Informed by modern classical, European folk, and minimalist avant-garde/experimental music, *The Marble Index* represented a kind of "post–Velvets" linkage of mass music and theoretical music while the Velvets were steadily moving towards standard and standardized rock and roll.

In terms of the Conclusion, while quality assessments are perhaps inevitable in discussing music, the goal of this project is not record reviews. It is not so much concerned with whether Paul McCartney or John Lennon wrote the better Beatles' songs but how they approached popular music and the avant-garde around McCartney's quest for artistic sophistication versus Lennon's drive for cultural confrontation. It does not seek to ascertain whether Frank Zappa was a musical genius and/or a pretentious jerk, but the myriad contradictions of Zappa's assemblage of popular music, the avant-garde, sophomoric comedy, social criticism, and his dim view of mass culture and the culture industry while working within its regimes. It does not engage in the debate over whether the Velvet Underground was a better band with or without John Cale, but does contend the Velvets increasingly abandoned the avant-garde as they broke from Warhol, the EPI, Nico, and finally Cale.

In the scope of cultural history, this is not an autopsy to determine when the avant-garde died yet alone an investigation into how postmodernism killed it. Given the critical discourse around Lou Reed's legacy, the view that the avant-garde reached its demise by the 1960s has been subsumed by a view that the 1960s was the last hurrah of a modernist/avant-garde impetus in rock music, and here one can include Fredric Jameson and Jacques Attali along with mainstream rock critics.[20] This is not necessarily in dispute. "Avant-rock" bands that proliferated in the late 1960s concurrent with the Beatles, the Mothers, and the Velvets can be heard as laying the

groundwork for two of the major rock subgenres in the 1970s, the progressive rock of the early 1970s and the punk/post-punk of the late 1970s: the former represented by bands such as Pink Floyd, Soft Machine, and United States of America and the latter by bands such as the Monks, Red Krayola, and the Stooges.

What is being questioned is the adequacy of modernism and postmodernism as categories to assess avant-rock as convergences of mass music and theoretical music. Jameson argued a defining aspect of postmodernism is "the effacement … of the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture, and the emergence of new kinds of texts infused with the forms, and content of that very culture industry so passionately denounced by all the ideologies of the modern."[21] Or, as Zappa described the basic concept behind the Mothers of Invention, "I composed a composite, gap-filling product that fills most of the gaps between so-called serious music and so-called popular music."[22] In short, the historical interaction between rock music and the avant-garde in the counterculture climate of the late 1960s is part and parcel of a postmodern withering away of the boundaries between high culture and mass culture. Rather than drawing tenuous borderlines between modernism and postmodernism (modernism = good; postmodernism = bad), a contextual-historical overview of the era requires textual-musical specificity of bands and songs addressing issues of dissonance, noise, performance, and cultural reference points: be they derived from Dada or doo-wop. Ultimately, the issue at stake is how rock music approached the axiom that "radical content demands radical form" amid the political unrest and apex of the counterculture in the late 1960s.

# Part One

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# All You Need Is Studio Time (or, the Ballad of John and Yoko)

*The Beatles*

# 1

## Rebranding the Beatles

### *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967)

> We were fed up with being the Beatles. We really hated that fucking four little mop-top boys approach…. [We] thought of ourselves as artists rather than just performers…. I got this idea…. Lets develop alter-egos so we're not having to project an image which we know…. It won't be the Beatles, it'll be this other band, so we'll be able to lose our identities in this…. With our alter-egos we could do a bit of B.B. King, a bit of Stockhausen, a bit of Albert Alyer, a bit of Ravi Shankar, a bit of *Pet Sounds*, a bit of the Doors.[1]
>
> —Paul McCartney

### *The Limits of Beatlemania:* Sgt. Pepper *as Concept Album*

The Beatles' stature in rock history is best reflected in a *Rolling Stone* poll of critics, musicians, and record industry insiders compiling the "500 Greatest Albums of All Time." *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* ranked #1, *Revolver* #3, *Rubber Soul* #5, and *The Beatles* (a.k.a. *The White Album*) #10.[2] As the *Rolling Stone* poll would have it, four of the top ten and the three of the top five "greatest albums of all time" were recorded by the Beatles and all released between 1965 and 1968.

Originating as a bar band influenced by Chuck Berry, Buddy Holly, and the Everly Brothers with a catalog of R&B and Fifties rock covers, by the early 1960s the Beatles were the most successful rock band in the world with a

repertoire of catchy pop-rock songs along with their iconic "mop-top" haircuts and matching suits. With Beatlemania sweeping the world, their first appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in February 1964 drew an estimated 70 million viewers and the band starred in two musical-comedy films, *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and *Help!* (1965; both directed by Richard Lester). The former was a frantic mock-documentary that mildly satirized the Beatlemania phenomenon while the latter was a madcap espionage film spoof. Both films were accompanied by requisite soundtrack albums and the album *Help!* yielded a crucial moment in the Beatles' musical evolution with "Yesterday." A ballad penned by McCartney, although credited to "Lennon/McCartney" per the band's contractual arrangements, McCartney sang and played acoustic guitar solo and longtime Beatles' producer George Martin arranged and overdubbed a string quartet accompaniment.[3] Internal debate ensued as Beatles' manager Brain Epstein adamantly insisted that "Yesterday" be released as a Beatles song despite it effectively being a McCartney solo song. Added the second side of the *Help!* soundtrack album, the band refused to allow EMI to release it as a single in the U.K. as it was out of character musically and, more implicitly, represented Lennon's frequent complaints about McCartney's "granny music." However, Capitol released "Yesterday" as a single in the U.S., where it topped the charts for a month and became one of the Beatles' most famous songs.

On *Rubber Soul* (1965), the Beatles made initial effort to expand the musical and lyrical vocabularies of their songs beyond the pop-rock love songs. As brief examples, "Think for Yourself" was a George Harrison song with a vague "anti-authority" message. A brisk 4/4 rock song, McCartney played a regular bass part as well as overdubbing an overpowering fuzz bass line acting as a kind of lead guitar riff, an element of "noise" signifying dissent along the lines of Keith Richards' fuzz guitar riff on the Rolling Stones' "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" (1965).[4] Incorporating Indian music influences, "Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)" was in slow 12/8 and Harrison played sitar as a lead instrument. Lyrically, it was Lennon's veiled account of an extramarital affair he was having.

In the spring of 1966, the Beatles intended to complete their third and final film for United Artists. However, the band was not entirely pleased with the

work experience during *Help!* or the film itself and reluctant to collaborate with Lester again. Various proposed projects fell through or were rejected outright by the band, fearing they could easily lapse into the unintentional self-parody of Elvis Presley's movies. Putting cinema on hold (the difficulties of eventually completing the third film owed to UA is returned to in Chapter 5), the Beatles used the unexpected lull in their schedule to record a new album before what became their final concert tour from June to August 1966. The result was *Revolver* (1966), which represented an even more significant point in the band's evolution and eclecticism. Unlike previous albums recorded in a few days or, at the most, a few weeks, the Beatles spent over two months completing *Revolver*, drawing more extensively from other musical genres, using session musicians to augment the sound (horns, strings, non-Western instruments), and exploring studio composition. While the front cover of *Rubber Soul* was an elongated, low-angle photo of the band, suggesting the Beatles were "stretching" musically as well, *Revolver*'s cover was a large line drawing of the band member's heads interspersed with a collage of photos, suggesting a "fragmentation" of musical styles and individual personalities that became more pronounced on subsequent albums like *The White Album* and *Let It Be*.

*Revolver*'s opening song was Harrison's "Taxman," the Beatles' first overtly political song which rebuked Labour Party leader/Prime Minister Harold Wilson and Conservative Party leader Edward Heath by name. However, the anti-government sentiments were directed at British taxation policies that resulted in a substantial amount of the Beatles' income being garnished rather than a critique of economic inequality or addressing greater issues of social change (i.e., Lennon's vociferous anti-war activism by the late 1960s). It was also one of the Beatle's more aggressive rock songs with a punk simplicity: the song is essentially a repeated D7 chord with a D7♯9 accent after each vocal line and a three-bar C7-C7-G7♯9 progression for the chorus. The harsh, staccato guitars double the snare backbeat against McCartney's syncopated, ascending, one-bar bass line.[5] The following song was the almost antithetical "Eleanor Rigby," a McCartney song about loneliness and death that eschewed the rock band entirely for a classical string section (cf. "Yesterday"). A song about a relationship that is not as idyllic as it seems on the surface, Harrison's "I Want to Tell You" was more in keeping with the Beatles' trademark sound,

although it utilized noticeable dissonance. Written in A-major, the song frequently places E against F between the musical instruments, with E and F being half-steps and F also being "out of key" as opposed to F ♯ per the A-major scale; this dissonance is particularly pronounced in McCartney's overdubbed piano part which Walter Everett cogently described as manifesting a tense "clumsy finger-tapping impatience."[6]

The shifting between diverse musical styles that characterized much of *Revolver* also indicated a tendency towards pastiche. Along the lines of the classical influence of "Eleanor Rigby," McCartney's melancholy "For No One" featured a clavichord and a French horn solo. Conversely, McCartney's up-tempo "Got to Get You into My Life," an ode to marijuana disguised as a love song, was a Motown-influenced track replete with a swinging horn section.[7] Harrison's "Love You To" was a pop song filtered through Indian music with Harrison on sitar backed by members of the Asian Music Circle. Lennon's closing track "Tomorrow Never Knows" demonstrated the growing interests in electronic music as well as Indian music, incorporating Ringo Starr's syncopated backbeat variation by playing on the two and the upbeat between three and four, Harrison playing a droning tamboura, tape loops ranging from vocal noises to extracts from a Jean Sibelius symphony, and an extensive use of studio effects.

As Peter Ames Carlin observed, "It was all coming together in 1966: the literary and the commercial; the hubris and the heartbreak; the pop savvy and avant-garde ambition. Pop songs could be art [and] rock albums could be conceived and executed as distinctive, extended statements."[8] By 1966, albums besides *Revolver* that challenged the formal and/or lyrical boundaries and conventions of rock included the Mothers of Invention's *Freak Out!* and the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* (which McCartney freely admitted was a major influence on *Sgt. Pepper*). In this context, *Sgt. Pepper* was not a radical departure musically given the direction(s) pursued on *Rubber Soul* and especially *Revolver*. Rather, *Sgt. Pepper* and the subsequent *Magical Mystery Tour* (1967) can be heard as a continuation of the Beatles' musical and political evolution that began with *Rubber Soul* and developed further on *Revolver.*

As well as drawing from and merging disparate genres ranging from rock, pop, classical, music hall, brass band, Indian, avant-garde/experimental, etc., *Sgt. Pepper's* songs were meticulously assembled in the studio around the initial performances and modified with a plethora of overdubs and effects; it took over four months to complete and cost an estimated $40,000 (in 1967 monetary terms, a sizable sum to spend on an album).[9] Despite *Sgt. Pepper's* stature in rock history, a recurring criticism of the album is the production process and the emphasis on studio composition. In comparing *The Velvet Underground and Nico* to *Sgt. Pepper*, Joe Harvard claimed

> [*Sgt. Pepper's*] finished product owes more to production genius after the fact than live performance. The Beatles played practically nothing on *Sgt. Pepper's* as an ensemble, using probably the most technically advanced producer of the day, while the Velvets performed the majority of their record together in single passes while amateur producers [Norman] Dolph and [Andy] Warhol managed effectively to capture the unprecedented sounds being made. *Spontaneity and a great performance are preferable to flawless recording technique*.[10]

Here Harvard reiterates what is a central tenet in rock ideology. The "proper role" of the studio, and no matter how advanced the technology, is to ultimately serve as a glorified stage with recording equipment and capturing a live performance "as is."[11] The more the studio becomes integral to the compositional process through editing, effects, and/or overdubbing the more it dilutes the original performance and the more "inauthentic" it becomes. In other words, rock ideology constructs a crucial difference between a "well-produced" album and an "over-produced" album—especially when extensive studio production is perceived as "cheating" (e.g., Auto-Tune, sampling, uncredited musicians filling in for the band, etc.). However, as far as the overall criticism of studio albums as inherently deficient, Paul Hegarty countered

> Across the range of new music from the 1950s on, the studio had played a part—as laboratory in the case of *musique concrète*, or in the case of much popular music, as a location of commodification of "authentic" music…. All technologies play a role in moulding the content of artistic form, but this had never seemed so pronounced with

> the combination of the use of the studio and the LP record in the rock music of the late 1960s. Critics have consistently maintained these two developments led to progressive rock, encouraging self-indulgent art music, or for considerably fewer music critics, a chance for musicians to expand the limits of what rock could do.[12]

The Beatles' focus on studio production also stemmed from the fact that concerts simply became unfeasible and they decided to abandon live performances altogether. On their final U.S. tour in August 1966, the Beatles were still entrenched in their mop-top image and playing baseball stadiums and other arena settings filled with screaming fans to the point the band could not be heard over the crowd. Moreover, none of the songs from *Revolver* were performed during the final tour as the material proved difficult to effectively translate from the studio to the stage. By 1966, the Velvet Underground were transforming rock concerts into disorientating multi-media experiences as part of Andy Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable while the release of the Mothers of Invention's *Freak Out!* heralded the emergence of the "avant-rock" studio album. The Beatles were effectively mired in Beatlemania ca. 1964–5: a cultural phenomenon that had become Establishment and the Beatles along with it.

John Lennon subsequently dismissed the idea that *Sgt. Pepper* was a "concept album" in the conventional sense of interconnected songs that construct a narrative saga, philosophical treatise, and/or social commentary like the Moody Blues' *Days of Future Past* (1967), the Pretty Things' *S.F. Sorrow* (1968), the Who's *Tommy* (1968), or the Kinks' *The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society* (1968). However, *Sgt. Pepper* was a concept album in the sense McCartney outlined, the construction of an "alter-ego" band to record songs outside the constraints and expectations of the Beatles' almost deified public image.[13] Indeed, McCartney laid the groundwork for *Sgt. Pepper* when he cagily implied in an early 1967 interview with the *Sunday Times* that the Beatles were disbanding and his recently grown mustache represented "part of breaking-up the Beatles. *I no longer believe in the image*.... I'm no longer one of the four moptops."[14]

Hence, *Sgt. Pepper* seemed like a radical break from the Beatles' past due to the "alter-ego" concept behind it and, as important, how *Sgt. Pepper*

rebranded the Beatles' image from Establishment "mop-tops" to counterculture "hippies" and modernist "artists." As the focal point on the front cover, the Beatles are clad in multi-colored, marching band attire and they all have longer hair and moustaches; Lennon is also wearing his trademark wire-rimmed glasses for the first time on Beatles' album. "The Beatles" is written in red flowers on the ground and a bass drum is inscribed with the album title which replaces the iconic Beatles logo that was a fixture on Starr's bass drum head in the mop-top era. These "counterculture Beatles" are officiating a funeral that is being attended by a plethora of cultural, literary, and philosophical figures and iconic images in a Pop Art collage; among them are Marlon Brando, William S. Burroughs, Lewis Carroll, Alistair Crowley, Bob Dylan, W.C. Fields, Sigmund Freud, Aldous Huxley, Laurel and Hardy, Karl Marx, Tom Mix, Marilyn Monroe, Edgar Allan Poe, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and H.G. Wells. Most importantly, the mop-top Beatles ("Establishment Beatles") dejectedly stand just to the left of the *Sgt. Pepper*-Beatles ("counterculture Beatles") stationed directly over the flowerbed/grave marked "the Beatles." The mop-top Beatles are placed in the position of looking at their own burial site and recognizing they are dead. In turn, the counterculture Beatles are placed front and center of a mélange of signifiers across the spectrum where pop culture and modernism breaks down into collage, thereby rebranding these new Beatles as not only hippies but modernists and *not* "pop stars." The gatefold cover was simply a large, intimate portrait of the counterculture Beatles and the back cover consisted of another photo of the counterculture Beatles on the bottom of the record sleeve and, in a first for a rock album, the printed lyrics to all the songs: a gesture that reinforced the idea that if rock music was indeed becoming a legitimate form of art, lyrics were not only a central part of the song but could even be read independently as "poetry."

While *Sgt. Pepper* was neither as overtly "political" nor as formally "avant-garde" as the Mothers of Invention's *Absolutely Free* or *The Velvet Underground and Nico*—both also released in 1967—*Sgt. Pepper* became the album synonymous with counterculture era and its utopian aspirations of individual and collective enlightenment around "peace and love" or, at least, "sex, drugs, and rock and roll." Indeed, the cultural capital generated around *Sgt. Pepper* was exemplified by "LSD-guru Timothy Leary's

identification of the Beatles as avatars of the new world order…. McCartney seemed surprised at this appropriation: 'I don't think changing the world was really in our minds.'"[15] The impetus for *Sgt. Pepper* was not so much dissatisfaction with the state of the world but the Beatles' frustration with their role as pop music icons which they viewed as limiting artistic progress as individuals and as a band. However, it was McCartney who gravitated towards the avant-garde in the mid–1960s, well before Lennon firmly assumed the mantle of the Beatles' resident avant-garde provocateur /visionary by the end of the decade. "I had a very rich avant-garde period which was such a buzz…. I was living alone in London, and all the other guys were married in the suburbs, which was very square in my mind."[16] In January of 1967 McCartney spearheaded the Beatles' first foray into avant-garde/experimental-music, a *musique concrète* piece almost running almost fourteen minutes titled "Carnival of Light" for inclusion at "The Million Volt Light and Sound Rave" (Roadhouse Theater, January 29 and February 4, 1967). Recorded and mixed over the course of five hours following a vocal overdub session for "Penny Lane," the improvised "Carnival of Light" featured –among other sounds –drones, clattering percussion, electric guitar feedback, parodic keyboards (theater organ, night club piano), McCartney and Lennon providing vocal sounds ranging from screaming random words to gargling water, and extensive use of studio effects like reverb, echo, and tape manipulations like speed variance and backwards tracks.[17]

### *Critique of the Middle Class: "She's Leaving Home" and "Good Morning Good Morning"*

If *Sgt. Pepper* can be considered as the Beatles' transition to a counterculture band, the underlying issue became distancing the Beatles from the mainstream stardom and status they attained. In 1967, the Beatles were not necessarily thought of as an "oppositional" rock band like the Rolling Stones or the Who—a situation that increasingly concerned Lennon much more than McCartney as the decade drew to a close. As noted, during the production of *Sgt. Pepper* McCartney was unmarried, living alone in central London, and immersed in the avant-garde scene while the other

Beatles were married and residing in suburban London: a lifestyle McCartney considered "very square" and, by implication, McCartney self-defining himself as the lone "hip" Beatle at the time. However, in comparing two songs which address the crisis of middle-class life in the late 1960s, McCartney's "She's Leaving Home" can be heard as a "conservative" musical defense of middle-class lifestyle whereas Lennon's "Good Morning Good Morning" offered the more "avant-garde" subversive study of suburban life.

Inspired by a *Daily Mail* story about a teenage runaway, "She's Leaving Home" was written by McCartney with the assistance of Lennon. The Beatles do not provide any musical backing, which is instead supplied by session musicians: a harp playing arpeggios in 3/4 and a string section.[18] McCartney's vocal is in the third person, describing a young woman who runs away to escape a mundane, middle-class life. The chorus is a call-and response duet between McCartney and Lennon, with Lennon's vocal in the first person adopting the point-of-view of the parents who feel saddened and betrayed by their daughter's actions. William M. Northcutt argued the song contains a subversive element in that

> The parents' selfish responses expose their morality … their daughter is running away with someone of the lower class and will obviously gain sexual experience. McCartney clearly saw the antiquated ballad as a means to promote youth rebellion, but this kind of ditty created tensions among the band members, who suspected such work as "soft."[19]

This is not to deny the poignancy of "She's Leaving Home," but the song suggests a mixed political message sympathetic to the parents' plight as much as any promotion of youth rebellion. The musical framework of strings and harp is not rock and roll, yet alone psychedelic rock. Instead, it borders on MOR/easy listening that could not only be pejoratively categorized as schmaltzy but signifies the music of the older generation and bourgeois culture, a music devoid of dissonance and noise (an issue taken up further next chapter regarding "Your Mother Should Know" from *Magical Mystery Tour*). One might say musically "She's Leaving Home" tugs at the heart rather than jars the ears, and the song is indicative of a

sentimentality that tends to permeate McCartney's songs. In contrast, if *We're Only in It for the Money* was Zappa's overall caustic response to *Sgt. Pepper*, the equally poignant and far grimmer "Mom and Dad" can be heard as a specific response to "She's Leaving Home" (discussed in Chapter 9).[20]

"Good Morning Good Morning" was a Lennon composition written in response to his growing disaffection with suburban lifestyle. It was initially inspired by a jingle from a Kellogg's cereal commercial Lennon heard on TV one morning which was loosely adapted as the chorus to the song. It appears in odd, seemingly random points of the song and maddeningly repeated when it does appear. Moreover, the verses frequently change time signatures in bewildering combinations (3/4, 4/4, 5/4) with Starr hammering out a quarter-note snare beat to anchor the song.[21] A horn section was also overdubbed sporadically playing parts somewhere between brass band, big band, and free jazz. To add to the frenzy, another element of noise was added by ending the song with a series of animal sound-effects with "each played, at John's insistence, in order of their ability to eat, or at least frighten, its predecessor."[22] Indeed, on "Good Morning" suburban life is presented as unpredictable alternations of disorientation, repetition, and ultimately real or potential predatory violence. It represents a dramatic contrast to the middle-class, middle-aged melancholy of "She's Leaving Home."

### *Grand Finale: "A Day in the Life"*

"A Day in the Life" closed *Sgt. Pepper* and one of the few later Lennon/McCartney compositions actually written by the both Lennon and McCartney, although originating as two relatively dissimilar songs penned individually and subsequently combined. The first half composed and sung by Lennon is a slow piano/acoustic guitar ballad with Starr's hi-hat maintaining the quarter-note beat while adding drum rolls with a half-time feel. Like much of Lennon's work during the era, the lyrics were oblique yet observational. The first verse was Lennon's reaction to a newspaper report about Tara Browne, a socialite acquaintance and heir to the Guinness fortune who was killed in a car accident; the second verse refers to Richard

Lester's Brechtian anti-war satire *How I Won the War* (1967) in which Lennon played a supporting role as a cynical soldier; the third verse taken from another newspaper story about local road construction. Written by McCartney, the second half is brisk, piano-driven pop-rock with McCartney singing lead about the beginnings of a typical morning, although the lines about smoking and dreaming none-too-subtly suggested marijuana use. While the musical track continues, Lennon sings a wordless vocal melody line recalling the first part while an orchestra enters with ominous punctuations. Lennon then sings a third verse in the same vocal melody of the first half (the Lennon part) over the second half music (the McCartney part). As noted, this third verse was inspired by another newspaper story about pothole problems which Lennon used fairly verbatim for the lyrics but was nonetheless accused of being code for intravenous drug use.

"A Day in the Life" is also famous for the orchestral discord that bridges the two parts of the song and also serves as the finale. After the parts were recorded and, without any concrete ideas on how to combine the parts, they recorded 24 bars of a steady pattern of increasingly dissonant piano chords over which Mal Evans, his voice treated with echo effects, counted each bar in succession and, as a joke, set off an alarm clock at the end. Eventually, it was decided to make the bridge intensely striking by using a 41-piece orchestra playing an atonal, ascending glissando. Martin recounted that he gave the musicians a notation of "the lowest possible note of each of the instruments…. At the end of twenty-four bars, I wrote the highest note each instrument could reach that was near the chord of E major. Then I put a squiggly life right through the twenty-four bars."[23] Martin also instructed the musicians only to pay attention to what they were playing and not what the others were playing. Five takes of the orchestra were recorded, all vastly different yet equally dissonant due to the aleatory nature of the performance instructions, with two takes combined through multi-tracking to equal a full orchestra (i.e., 82 instruments). When the orchestral tracks were added, it produced a highly startling and disconcerting bridge, and the ringing alarm clock was left in the final mix—not only because it ironically complimented the opening line of rising out of bed but proved impossible to edit out of the final mix. Following a second orchestral bombardment of atonal glissando used to climax "A Day in the Life," the denouement is an E-major chord played in unison by McCartney, Lennon, Starr, and Evans on pianos and

Martin on harmonium. It was held out for over forty seconds through added reverb and echo effects.

Ultimately, the issue is not whether *Sgt. Pepper* was highly innovative or inherently flawed as far the role of studio composition. *Sgt. Pepper* became a crucial locus in the assemblage of popular music and avant-garde/experimental music—and popular culture and modernism—in the late 1960s. As a linkage of mass music and theoretical music, *Sgt. Pepper* offers moments of tense negotiations between the two, but in the overall scope of the album the encroachments of theoretical music are held at bay by mass music. Paul Hegarty suggested that "*Sgt. Pepper's* offers much in the way of noise…. And yet, it really does not work as an example of noise: it is not dissonant enough, musically or socially…. The dissonance and long piano chord at the end of 'Day in the Life' are still an ending, suggesting a society that heads in the same direction."[24] Throughout "A Day in the Life" the listener is provided a highly uneasy musical representation of modern life: Starr's propulsive but off-balance drumming; the juxtaposition of two dissimilar songs sections that reach an uncomfortable synthesis as the third verse; lyrical allusions to death, war, and drugs; the dissonant orchestral blocs that jarringly act as a transitional section between incongruent parts as well as acting as a climax or, perhaps more correctly, a false climax. "A Day in the Life" rectifies discord with the final note, the sustained E-major chord as an overdetermined tonality that becomes a kind of serene sigh of relief as opposed to a disordered gasping for breath had the song ended with the second orchestral section as a reiteration of mass dissonance.

Theodor W. Adorno suggested, "*It is no accident that tonality was the musical language of the bourgeois era*. The harmony of the universal and the particular correspond to the classical liberal model of society. As in the latter, tonality as the *invisible hand*…. The universal resolution of tension…. *This model was never adequate to reality, but was to a large extent ideology*."[25] Adorno championed the 12-tone music of Arnold Schoenberg and its inevitable moments of dissonance as an immanent critique of the contradictions of capitalism and liberal democracy. Rather than tonality reconciling individual notes as "social atoms" into collective "social harmony," dissonance represents individual notes as "social antagonists" and collective discord (an issue taken up further in Chapter 10

and Frank Zappa's use of dissonance). In this respect, "A Day in the Life" ends with an extended "universal resolution of tension." The final note becomes the signifier that, in the end, "all is well" musically and socially—or at least the promise that "out of chaos comes order" and the possibility of a counterculture utopia. While Jacques Attali hailed the rock of the 1960s as a subversive noise erupting within modern society—in particular, the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix, and Janis Joplin—he dismissed the Beatles as "the idealized form of … docile pseudorevolt, it assured that young people were very effectively socialized, in a world of pettiness constructed by adults…. The music is experienced as a relation, not as spectacle."[26]

As suggested, the "noise" potentialities of *Sgt. Pepper's* avant-garde/experimental musical elements were limited by the insistence on rock and pop structures, ultimately maintaining the Beatles sound as it became more artistic sophisticated rather than directly challenging listeners and possibly alienating fans. *Sgt. Pepper* and "A Day in the Life" implemented the avant-garde for *artistic* purposes and the manufacture of a more erudite musical product. To reiterate Peter Bürger's contention, the failure of the neo-avant-garde "institutionalizes the *avant-garde as art*…. It is the status of their products, not the consciousness artists have of their activity, that defines the social effects of their works."[27] As addressed in Chapter 4, while there is much to be critical of with the avant-garde musical-political projects of John Lennon and Yoko Ono, they placed a premium on the cultural role of the avant-garde as confrontation and social praxis that was ultimately lacking on *Sgt. Pepper*.

Not unrelated, *Sgt. Pepper* bears assessment in terms of Fredric Jameson's aforementioned claim postmodernism in rock began with "punk and new wave (the Beatles and the Stones now standing as the high-modernist moment of that more recent and rapidly evolving tradition)."[28] Andrew Goodwin argued

> Jameson's analysis of music … offers a reading that places the Beatles and the Rolling Stones … as examples of "high modernism" and the Clash, Talking Heads, and the Gang of Four … as "postmodern." What this broad classification of music eludes, however, is the necessity of

> identifying musical differences within two historical moments which suggest more specific, if still crude parameters of rock "realism" (the Clash) and rock "modernism" (Talking Heads, Gang of Four), and of rock "authenticity" (the Stones) versus pop "artifice" (the Beatles). Historically, the music of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones articulated the social and political currents of the 1960s counter-culture. The Clash and the Gang of Four … addressed political questions from a standpoint associated with punk rock—a quite different counter-cultural form which eschewed the peace and love message of the Beatles or the nihilistic hedonism of the Stones in favor of blunt left-wing critiques of life…. Looked at from the point of view of aesthetic form, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones need to be differentiated: if the development of modernism is at issue here, the increasingly artificial … of the Beatles is modernist (self-conscious, ironic, knowingly artificial) in contrast with the "authentic" rough-edged blues inflictions of the Stones and their lyrical themes of sexuality and violence.[29]

Despite the differences, Jameson and Goodwin concur that the Beatles were "modernist" as opposed to "postmodernist."[30] However, *Sgt. Pepper* can be heard as crucial *postmodernist* moment in rock in its "self-conscious, ironic, knowingly artificial" approach and eclectic use of disparate genres as pastiche: as McCartney put it, "A bit of B.B. King, a bit of Stockhausen, a bit of Albert Alyer, a bit of Ravi Shankar…." Jameson argued, "Modernist style thereby becomes postmodernist codes…. Parody finds itself without a vocation; it has lived and that strange new thing pastiche has taken its place. Pastiche … is a neutral practice … blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs."[31] In this respect, *Sgt. Pepper* arguably marked rock music's entry into postmodernism as opposed to high-modernism and raises the issue that any mass music/theoretical music "link-ups" ultimately become part of the postmodern (i.e., the breakdown of modernist culture and mass culture). While postmodernism's thorny triumvirate of parody, pastiche, and politics become central to the critical debate over *The White Album*, a project widely regarded as one of the Beatles' major artistic miscues initially followed *Sgt. Pepper*: *Magical Mystery Tour*.

# 2

## Music Television

*Magical Mystery Tour* (1967)

> If stage shows were to be out, we wanted something to replace them. Television was the obvious answer.[1]
>
> —John Lennon

### *From Stage to Screen: The Beatles and "Promotional Films"*

Before discussing *Magical Mystery Tour*, it is necessary to consider TV's relationship to popular music and, more specifically, the Beatles' relationship to the medium. Since the mid–1950s, rock performers regularly appeared as guests on TV variety shows. However, these performances were not free of controversy, namely Elvis Presley's early TV appearances. On June 5, 1956, Presley appeared on *The Milton Berle Show* performing "Hound Dog" in all of his pelvis-gyrating glory, igniting a national controversy over moral decency and rock music. Shortly afterward (July 1, 1956) Presley appeared on *The Steve Allen Show* to perform "Hound Dog." Under the guise of defusing controversy through comedy, Presley uncomfortably performed the song in a tuxedo serenading a Bassett Hound in a move seemed expressly designed to mock Presley, his fans, and rock music in general (discussed further in Chapter 6). On his third and final appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* (January 6, 1957), CBS censors simply insisted that Presley only be shown from the waist up during his performance.

In the early 1960s, "chart shows" emerged dedicated to popular music, and rock music in particular, gaining a foothold with younger people as the target audience as opposed to the mainstream primetime variety shows.[2] An hour-long chart show featuring teens and young adults dancing to hit songs, *American Bandstand* became a Saturday afternoon staple on ABC from 1963 to 1987, hosted by "America's oldest teenager" Dick Clark for the entirety of its run on the network. In the U.K., ITV's *Ready Steady Go!* aired on Friday evenings from 1963 to 1966; *Top of the Pops* (*TOTP*) debuted in 1964 and became part of BBC1's Thursday evening programming well into the 1990s. While chart shows usually featured in-studio performances of stars lip-synching and miming to hit songs, an alternative format entailed bands making "promotional films" for newly released songs.

In this context, and despite having starred in two successful feature films by 1966, it is not surprising the Beatles saw the potential for TV as a viable alternate for concerts. Their first appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in April 1964 became an iconic moment in pop culture history and one of the defining moments of Beatlemania. In 1965, ABC launched *The Beatles*, a Saturday morning, half-hour animated program with episodes produced until 1967 with reruns airing until 1969. Each episode consisted of two short comical-narrative segments loosely based on a Beatles song and a performance of said song in its entirety within the segment; the middle portion of the show was an "audience participation" section in which viewers were invited to sing-along to two Beatles songs while the lyrics were shown on the TV screen. However, the Beatles had no involvement with the show other than use of the songs and their images (actors Paul Frees and Lance Percival supplied the voices of the Beatles). Norma Coates pointed out the ABC cartoon represented the Beatles through their mop-top image and era, which is to say pre–*Sgt. Pepper* Beatles, and effectively locked the Beatles into their less culturally threatening mop-top image for an assumed audience of tweens and younger teens throughout the late 1960s.[3] As well as anachronistically representing the Beatles, the cartoons could be woefully "politically incorrect." A glaring example was "Tomorrow Never Knows" (1967; all segments were titled in accordance to the featured Beatles' song). After coming across a Stonehenge-type monument, the Beatles fall into a well and travel to "the Inner Earth"—a

stereotypical pastiche of Third World signifiers from Africa, Asia, and Latin America populated by primitive natives and exotic dancing women. After the Beatles perform "TNK," the natives worship them as gods and the mystical King of Inner Earth wants the Beatles to marry his eligible daughters. While it could be interpreted as a satirical commentary on the Beatles' stature as global rock stars, the episode embarrassingly reeked of Orientalism during an era of Third World revolution, especially considering Harrison's embrace of Indian culture and Lennon's global political activism (in fairness, keeping in mind the Beatles were not involved in the actual production of the shows).

In May of 1966, the Beatles made four promotional films for the single "Paperback Writer." One aired on *TOTP* (June 2, 1966) and was shot on the grounds of Chiswick House. The Beatles are shown alternatingly miming the song (lip-synching, playing instruments) and engaged in other actions (pensively staring, walking about) amid the neo-classical statues and lush greenery, placing the Beatles in an upper-class bourgeois milieu.[4] A more straightforward performance film shot at Abbey Road Studios (formerly EMI Studios) and aired exclusively on *The Ed Sullivan Show* (June 5, 1966). Harrison recounted, "We thought, 'We can't go anywhere. We're stopping touring and we'll send the films to promote the records….' Nowadays everybody does that—it's part of the promotion of the single—so I suppose in a way we invented MTV."[5] Here Harrison makes clear the intent of these films was a means to advertise the song with a TV "performance" that did not require the band to show up in person.

In early 1967, the Beatles made promotional films for "Penny Lane" and "Strawberry Fields Forever." Two of the initial songs recorded during the *Sgt. Pepper* sessions, they were slated for the *Sgt. Pepper* album but released as a double A-side single in February 1967 at the insistence of EMI/Capitol in the Beatles had not released new records since August 1966 and *Sgt. Pepper's* release was scheduled for June 1967. Audiences got a sneak preview both musically and visually of the rebranded "counterculture Beatles" later unveiled on *Sgt. Pepper* when the films aired on *The Ed Sullivan Show* (February 12, 1967) *TOTP* (February 16, 1967), the ABC variety show *The Hollywood Palace* (February 25, 1967) and *American Bandstand* (March 11, 1967). Warning the audience they would see a "very

interesting and different looking Beatles," on *American Bandstand* after each promotional film Dick Clark queried the audience as to their response with an urgent solemnity as if he were discussing a screening of the Zapruder film. Reaction was decidedly mixed, and Clark's brief sociological survey did not so much indicate a "gender gap" between the male and female audience as it did a "gendering" of mass culture. Overall, male reaction was slightly more positive than the female reaction, although one male viewer dismissed the "Penny Lane" video as being "as bad as the Monkees" while another made it clear he was a Mick Jagger fan. In turn, much of the female reaction revolved around assessments like "funny," "weird," "ugly," and one woman lamented the Beatles now looked like "grandfathers." When another woman piped up that she liked the videos, she received a round of spontaneous applause.[6]

A McCartney composition, "Penny Lane" is a jaunty 4/4 song with a music-hall influence dominated by pianos and drums. Eschewing electric guitars entirely, the song is augmented by woodwinds and brass, punctuated with a "baroque" piccolo trumpet solo by David Mason (a highly respected classical musician who played on several Beatles songs). Lyrically, the song is a nostalgic remembrance of McCartney's childhood in Liverpool with Penny Lane the name of a major street in the city. As with other McCartney songs, specifically "Your Mother Should Know," genres of old-fashioned music like classical and music-hall are incorporated into pop and rock to house fond recollections of the "good old days." In the "Penny Lane" promotional film, shots of a mustached, bespectacled Lennon walking the streets of London are intercut with the Beatles—all with longer hair and moustaches or beards—clad in foxhunting attire riding horses through Knole Park. In two shots, Starr's drum kit with "The Beatles" logo on the bass drum can briefly be seen as they approach an ornate table. After the Beatles sit down for tea, men in regal attire and powdered wigs approach, hand the Beatles their respective guitars (although there are no guitars on "Penny Lane"), and Lennon overturns the table at which point the song and video concludes.

Here "Penny Lane" provides an internal critique of the Beatles' relationship to bourgeois culture. By the mid–1960s the Beatles were not only the most commercially and critically successful rock band in the world, but the

poster-boys for “Establishment friendly” rock music as opposed to the ostensibly “oppositional” rock stars like the Rolling Stones or the Who. As noted, the promotional film for “Paperback Writer” was shot on the grounds of Chiswick House and the Beatles performing amid neo-classical sculptures and well-kept grounds, thereby associating the Beatles with “high culture.”[7] “Penny Lane” essays that bind by juxtaposing the Beatles indulging in posh activities at Knole Park (tea time and a foxhunt) with Lennon seemingly walking around London with a sense of existential aimlessness. The moment the Beatles are “bequeathed” their musical instruments by the aristocracy and satisfy the anticipation that they will (finally) begin miming the song is the moment the Beatles’ revolt begins by “turning the tables”—with Lennon literally overturning the table—and dashing any expectations they viewer will see the band perform the song.

In contrast, “Strawberry Fields Forever” was one of the Beatles’ more ambitious exercises in studio composition. While like “Penny Lane” as a song about childhood in Liverpool, “SFF” became a languid song with obscure lyrics about the illusory nature of memory and reality. “SFF” was also indicative of Lennon’s tendencies towards unorthodox structures, varying meters (4/4 with occasional measures of 6/8), and subtle dissonances. Various versions were recorded with “Take 7” being a slow, psychedelic version in A-major featuring a Mellotron mimicking flutes and strings while the much different “Take 26” was a slightly faster version recorded in the key of B-major with cellos and trumpets arraigned by Martin. Lennon decided he liked the first part of Take 7 and the second half of Take 26. Assigning Martin the task of combining the two versions despite being in different keys and tempos, Take 7 was edited into Take 26 at approximately 1:00 into the song. In order to accomplish this feat, Martin and engineer Geoff Emerick vari-speeded the tape to a matching meter and roughly A ♯-major although the pitch of all the notes is microtonally “off-key” and the vari-speeding produced the phased, “wobbly” sound that permeates the final mix. The promotional film for “SFF” was shot at the same time as “Penny Lane” in Knole Park. Rather than any sort of narrative, the video is a collection of abstract images of the band members that extensively utilized experimental film techniques: jump-cuts (including abrupt cutting between daytime and nighttime sequences), reverse motion, long dissolves, superimposed images, and extreme close-ups. It effectively

captured the mood of leisurely disorientation without resorting to literal depictions of the lyrics.

The same month as the release of *Sgt. Pepper*, on June 25, 1967, the Beatles appeared on *One World*, a live satellite TV special that reached an estimated 400 million viewers across the world. Intended to promote global understanding amid the Cold War, Vietnam, and Third World revolutionary movements, the Beatles closed the *Our World* telecast with a performance Lennon's "All You Need Is Love." Lyrically, the song is an idealistic ode to the vision and goals of the Summer of Love and also represented what Lennon unapologetically called his "propaganda songs" with direct messages and sloganeering lyrics ("Revolution" or "Give Peace a Chance") rather than deliberate obscurity and ambiguous lyrics ("Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" and "I Am the "Walrus"). While not an overtly political song, it was a distinctly political statement in the context of the *One World* telecast and Lennon's first effort to "sell peace" to the world—especially since the most political the Beatles had been up to that point was personally receiving Medals of the British Empire from Queen Elizabeth and "Taxman," the band's complaint about how much of their income was being garnished by the government.

The Beatles' *Our World* segment took place at Abbey Road Studios and was actually a session in which they recorded much of "All You Need Is Love" live in one take over the basic tracks (piano, drums) accompanied by horns, strings, and an audience/chorus of rock stars including Mick Jagger and Keith Moon. In effect, the global audience watched the Beatles record their next single as it happened. The verses of "All You Need Is Love" are in a deceptively simple 29-bar pattern of 7/4 (two bars)—4/4 (two bars)—7/4 (one bar) while the verses singing the title hook are in 4/4 save a transitional 6/4 measure into the verse sections. The song opens with trumpets playing "La Marseilles" (the national anthem of France) and swirling strings and brass band punctuations are incorporated into the song throughout. In the conclusion, the song collapses into multiple voices singing variations on the title in call in response over a faltering 4/4 meter. Indeed, the song culminates as a joyous, collective anarchy signifying the utopian dreams of the counterculture topped off with a postmodern fanfare.

While the horns and strings quote Bach and Glenn Miller, Lennon ends the song by self-referentially belting out the chorus of "She Loves You."

The Beatles next major televised performance was a promotional film for "Hello Goodbye" shot on November 10, 1967, at the Saville Theater in London and directed by Paul McCartney. The single was released on November 25, the music video shown on *The Ed Sullivan Show* the next night, and the U.S. album version of *Magical Mystery Tour* released the day after.[8] The Beatles are shown playing "Hello Goodbye" in their *Sgt. Pepper* uniforms against an abstract psychedelic backdrop with "The Beatles" logo noticeably absent on the bass drum head of Starr's miniature drum kit. It is a fairly straightforward run-through of the song with a fair amount of mugging at the camera and, in the song's extended coda, the band is joined by hula dancers in grass skirts. At two points, the Beatles are also shown in a kind of generic group portrait, dressed in mop-top era matching suits waving at the camera, with the "Hello Goodbye" video representing a continuation of the *Sgt. Pepper* rebranding process with Beatles definitively waving "goodbye" to the mop-top era and "hello" to the counterculture.[9]

## *A Bad Trip:* Magical Mystery Tour

In 1967 the Beatles still owed a third feature film to United Artists, and one idea floated was a compilation film of music videos for each song on *Sgt. Pepper* each done by different, well-known directors (such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Federico Fellini, etc.); EMI vetoed the idea due to the budget required for such a film given the amount of money already spent on the album.[10] Having assumed the unofficial leadership role in the band, McCartney was of the mind that the next Beatles film could and should be a Beatles DIY project. As former Beatles publicist Tony Barrow recounted, "[McCartney] really expected *Magical Mystery Tour* to open doors for him, to make him the film producer of the Beatles…. He wanted to start an entirely new phase of their career…. But on his terms. He'd be the executive producer."[11] As a trial run at potential feature filmmaking as the well as the musical follow-up to *Sgt. Pepper*, *Magical Mystery Tour* was a TV special that included six new Beatles songs.[12] More specifically, *MMT*

can be defined as a concept promotional film made for primetime TV. There is little in the way of plot save for a scenario of some passengers on a scenic trip in a tour bus infused with skits, dreams sequences, and the musical numbers with emphasis on non-continuity editing and extensive use of film techniques that were in vogue during the era like jump-cuts, long takes, slow and fast motion, panning, tinting, and zooms. *MMT* also featured a plethora of bizarre costumes and Pop Art color schemes.

While co-produced, co-directed, and written by the Beatles, *MMT* was collectively improvised by cast and crew around a loose set of ideas for scenes rather than having a working script. As a result, the pacing of the film is erratic (to put it mildly) and some scenes—such as a sing-along on the tour bus or a madcap Mack Sennett-style car chase after Starr hijacks the tour bus for no apparent reason—bordered on the interminable. One segment of absurdist satirical comedy featured a British Army officer (Victor Spinetti) shouting gibberish instructions to the tour members on how to attack and kill a stuffed cow in what can be interpreted as a commentary on Vietnam. Another scene was a surreal dream sequence along the lines of Luis Buñuel. Lennon played a seedy waiter in a classy restaurant shoveling piles of mucky spaghetti onto the plate of Aunt Jessie (Jessie Robins) during a romantic dinner with Buster Bloodvessel (Ivor Cutler); however, the scene is undermined by the heavy-handed use of burbling electronic music to hammer home the point it is weird. While a commentary on bourgeois consumerism, the same message was more effectively stated in a different scene featuring Bloodvessel and Aunt Jessie. In a parody of romantic movie clichés, the two frolic in slow motion set to a corny orchestral version of "All My Loving," which in turn becomes an internal commentary on the Beatles' assimilation to mass consumer culture.

To say *MMT* was a major disappointment is an understatement. *MMT*'s debut on BBC1 (December 26, 1967) was savaged by critics as a hopelessly amateurish attempt at avant-garde cinema. Indeed, while the Monkees were being castigated for being a culture industry-constructed copy of the Beatles, *MMT* looked like a feeble attempt to imitate a typical episode of *The Monkees* sitcom. Among the many problems was that *MMT* was shot on 16mm color film which was most often used in educational, industrial, exploitation, pornographic, and underground films of the era. Considering it

was a production by the world's most successful rock band *MMT* had a surprisingly low-budget grainy look. While the style was derived from the avant-garde cinema of the 1960s, for mainstream Beatles fans not necessarily familiar with Jean-Luc Godard *MMT* appeared to be incompetently shot and haphazardly edited. Moreover, at the time all BBC1 telecasts were in black and white which severely diluted much of the visual impact as far as the colors and special effects. The widespread negative response to *MMT* discouraged American TV networks from purchasing broadcast rights and, with a 52 minute running time, *MMT* was too short to release as a theatrical feature film—meaning the UA contract for a third film was still intact. It proved to be the Beatles' first major artistic gaffe, and in no small part due to the Beatles' continuing flirtations with the avant-garde. Indeed, the night after *MMT*'s disastrous TV debut, David Frost invited McCartney as a special guest on *The Frost Programme*, with Frost introducing McCartney as "the man most responsible" for *MMT*. McCartney offered fairly sheepish defenses of *MMT* and placed much of the blame on viewer expectations that as a film it would have some kind of plot rather than contain a collection of astringent skits and promotional films for the songs on the *MMT* EP.

As far as the music videos in *MMT*, "Fool on the Hill" featured McCartney in a dream sequence roaming about cliffs with the visuals largely corresponding to the lyrics to the point of an unimaginative literalness. Harrison's "Blue Jay Way" fared slightly better as far as being a film-within-a film in *MMT*: the tour contingent crawls into a small tent which cuts to the interior of a movie theater showing "Blue Jay Way." While much of it is Harrison stoically sitting and lip-synching the song, the segment also utilizes double exposures and films being shown on Harrison's body against a black backdrop, which could be termed "film-within-a-film-within a film." However, building on the comparative analysis of McCartney's "She's Leaving Home" and Lennon's "Good Morning Good Morning" from *Sgt. Pepper* (discussed last chapter), the pivotal moments in *MMT* become Lennon's "I Am the Walrus" and McCartney's "Your Mother Should Know."

Serving as *MMT*'s closing number, "Your Mother Should Know" is a mid-tempo song in 4/4 dominated by a steady, quarter note piano part.

McCartney recounted the song was "a very music-hall kind of thing…. I've always hated generation gaps. I always feel sorry for a parent or child that doesn't understand each other…. So I was advocating peace between the generations."[13] It was not coincidental that the music and performance of the song in *MMT* hearkened back to the "good old days" of music-hall and Classical Hollywood cinema, specifically Busby Berkeley musical numbers, with the Beatles singing and dancing in white tuxedos. McCartney is the most animated Beatle, even breaking rank in the final thirty seconds to dance about in a more natural way—or simply hog the spotlight—while the other three carry on in the intentionally stiff song and dance choreography. Throughout the number, Lennon sports a frozen smirk while Harrison looks fairly glum (or, more charitably, stoic). Their expressions betray a sense that they'd rather be anywhere else than in front of the camera at that point of *MMT*.

To be sure, there is a satirical undercurrent and the fissures of late 1960s politics are addressed; midway through the number, a squadron of female RAF cadets makes an incongruous appearance marching single-fire through the throng of well-dressed ballroom dancers. However, when "Your Mother Should Know" is isolated from the video and assessed strictly around the song, it becomes a more conservative statement. As noted, "She's Leaving Home" expressed its sympathy towards the parents as much as the runaway teenager musically as much as lyrically: harp and violins working in tandem with McCartney's third-person account of the runaway contrasted by Lennon's first-person vocals representing the disheartened parents. It is the latter's position that becomes represented musically through the quasi-classical backdrop rather than rock as the generational signifier of young people in the 1960s. As a song McCartney wrote as a plea for generational peace, "Your Mother Should Know" moves further to the side of the older generation. While the title is actually referring to an old song the listener's mother would probably recognize if she heard it, it also suggests a statement of maternal authority and youth compliance. Lyrically, the song is a nostalgic ode to songs of the past, and "peace between generations" is manifest in the song's synthesis of music hall (the old) with pop and rock (the new) and a setting that excludes dissonance, noise, and disorientating time signature shifts in favor of melody and a steady beat: the antithesis of

Frank Zappa's abuse of old-time genres like doo-wop, marches, or vaudeville as anachronisms and points of parody and derision.

While "Your Mother Should Know" was conciliatory, Lennon's "I Am the Walrus" was confrontational. However, the impetus was Lennon's irritation with what he believed were gross misinterpretations of his enigmatic lyrics (e.g., the first verse of "A Day in the Life" about the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the third verse about drug use). With the message being a deliberate "anti-message," the lyrics to "Walrus" were cobbled together from three different unfinished songs, jottings made during LSD trips, some nonsense lines and words, a schoolyard nursery rhyme, references from Lewis Carroll (the Walrus and "the Eggman" Humpty Dumpty), a self-reference to "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," random modifications suggested by friends, and the use of politically charged rhetoric (the recurring use of the word "pigs" and mentions of guns and police). Lennon reportedly told an associate after the lyrics were completed, "Let the fuckers work that one out."

Musically, "Walrus" is performed by the band with Harrison on guitar, McCartney on bass, Starr on drums, and Lennon on electric piano and Mellotron as well as lead vocals. In what was becoming modus operandi, the band was augmented by strings, horns, and backup singers arraigned by George Martin. As a found object, "Walrus" also incorporated brief excerpts of a BBC radio transmission of a performance of *King Lear*. The song is driven by an insistent quarter-note drive with unorthodox variations in the chord changes while the phase-shifted strings do not so much play along but queasily play against the song in syncopated, ascending lines counter to the band's rhythmically steady, frequently descending riffs in the verses. Lennon's lead vocal has a dry, almost tinny megaphone sound and the backup singers do not sing along but interrupt the song with strategically placed whooping, laughing, and chanting. In turn, the *MMT* music video segment of "Walrus" makes extensive use of surreal images and disruptive film techniques (tinted shots, jump-cuts, split-screens, etc.). The band performs the song alternatingly dressed in psychedelic attire as well as grotesque pantomime theater animal costumes; in the background, four British constables holding hands sway in time to the song. While "Your Mother Should Know" advocated generational reconciliation musically as

well as in the lyrics, “Walrus” becomes a song about social disorientation and disorder manifest in the musical components, the oblique lyrics, and the surrealistic music video segment from *MMT*.

The *MMT* soundtrack was released weeks in advance of the disastrous TV special premiere. In the U.K., it appeared as a six song double EP (two 7-inch records). In the U.S., where record releases were effectively standardized around 7’-inch singles and 12-inch albums at the time, Capitol opted to release *MMT* as an album with the six songs from *MMT* as the first side and non-album singles from 1967 as the second side: “Hello Goodbye,” “Strawberry Fields Forever,” “Penny Lane,” “Baby, You’re a Rich Man,” and “All You Need Is Love.” At the time, the Beatles had an unofficial policy of not re-releasing singles on albums, believing it amounted to charging consumers twice for the same song, and they were not pleased with Capitol turning *MMT* into a semi-compilation album with previously released hit songs filling out the record.[14]

Despite the critical brickbats hurdled at *MMT* as a film and the Beatles’ own dissatisfaction, as an album *MMT* provided an effective encapsulation of the Beatles’ musical evolution by the end of 1967. Nonetheless, the critical beating taken by *MMT* had two effects. One was that it quashed the Beatles’—or at least McCartney’s—ambitions to utilize TV and potentially film as a viable means to perform and promote new musical product beyond standard promotional film fare. Second, McCartney’s creative leadership role established with *Sgt. Pepper* and continued through *MMT* was destabilized within the internal workings of the Beatles and individual musical identities began to be asserted. *The White Album* became a much more fragmented musical-political project precisely at a time the counterculture was beginning its decline, and the rifts developing within the band made a cohesive group identity impossible. Indeed, these ruptures ultimately assigned new roles to the Beatles as cultural icons.

# 3

## The Dialectic of Lennon/McCartney

*The Beatles* (a.k.a. *The White Album)* (1968)

> *Sgt. Pepper* did its thing—it was the album of the decade…. It was very innovative with great songs … but *The White Album* ended up a better album for me.[1]
>
> —Ringo Starr

### *Apple Corps and the Making of* The White Album

In 1967 the Beatles "incorporated" by establishing Apple Corps, an umbrella production company/management firm that included Apple Records, Apple Films, and Apple Publishing with the mission statement "to open the way to artistic fulfillment for writers, musicians, singers, and painters who have hitherto been unable to find acceptance in the commercial world."[2] Paul McCartney recounted Apple Corps was envisioned as a means to provide patronage to a multitude of artists through capital generated by the Beatles as "a kind of Western Communism."[3] However, the motivation was economically pragmatic despite Apple Corps' branding as a hotbed of oppositional culture. Realizing the considerable amount of taxable income the band was generating (an issue acerbically addressed in the song "Taxman"), Beatles manager Brian Epstein devised Apple Corps as a tax shelter as much as a radical production company. Unfortunately, Epstein died of a drug overdose in August of 1967, leaving Apple Corps without experienced—yet alone capable—management by the time the company officially began operation. The Beatles decided to run the

company themselves. By 1969, the combination of money-losing projects, lax business practices, and the Beatles' own extravagant spending and lifestyles resulted in Apple Corps veering perilously close to bankruptcy.[4]

While the messy business affairs of Apple Corps played a crucial factor in the eventual break-up the Beatles (discussed further in Chapter 5), there were also musical and personnel tensions developing within the band itself. The contentious sessions over five months that eventually produced *The White Album* nearly ended the band altogether. Essentially using Abbey Road Studios as a highly expensive personal practice space, the Beatles recorded numerous songs or versions of songs that were scrapped. Almost 100 takes were done for Harrison's "Not Guilty" which was eventually left off the album. Multiple versions of McCartney's ska pastiche "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" were recorded at different tempos and approaches over several days at McCartney's meticulous insistence. Finally, after McCartney insisted on recording yet another revised arraignment, a highly aggravated Lennon—who intensely disliked the song to begin with—stormed out of the studio, got high, returned hours later, and screamed at McCartney: "I am fucking *stoned* and *this* is how the fucking song should go!"[5] Commandeering the piano, Lennon propelled the band through a fast, somewhat slipshod version in one take that was eventually used for the final version's basic track. It rendered days of previous recording time moot, along with the money spent on studio time.

The incident was indicative of *The White Album* sessions. At one point, an exasperated George Martin went on an impromptu vacation and left assistant Chris Thomas in charge of the sessions while longtime engineer Geoff Emerick eventually quit amid the internal rancor. Ringo Starr even briefly left the Beatles in frustration at one point. In Starr's absence, McCartney played drums on "Dear Prudence" and all three played drum tracks on "Back in the U.S.S.R." Moreover, nearly half of the thirty songs on *The White Album* were not performed by the Beatles as a quartet (i.e., three or less members appearing on the given track). *Six* of those were McCartney compositions in which McCartney played all or most of the instruments, accompanying himself through overdubs and using session musicians and/or an occasional Beatle when and where necessary. "Wild Honey Pie" and "Blackbird" were McCartney solo tracks. "Mother Nature's

Son" was McCartney backed by brass and "Martha My Dear" McCartney accompanied by brass and strings (both songs arraigned by Martin). "Why Don't We Do It in the Road?" and "I Will" were performed by McCartney with Starr adding drums on the former and Lennon and Starr playing percussion on the latter. In contrast, Harrison only contributed *four* songs to the entirety of *The White Album*, most notably "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" which featured Eric Clapton on uncredited lead guitar. Like Lennon, Harrison was dividing his musical endeavors between the Beatles and musically dissimilar solo projects. McCartney was producing a number of "solo songs" packaged as Beatles product.

In this sense, *The White Album* was not so much a band album but a divided-up solo album by the various members. Not coincidentally, it was also the only Beatles album not to feature a visual representation of the band members on the front cover although the inner gatefold cover of *The White Album* included four *individual* photos of each band member. Designed by Pop Art pioneer Richard Hamilton, the album cover was an "anti-record cover" entirely in white stamped with "The Beatles" in small block letters, which gave the album its unofficial but better-known title *The White Album*. While the effect was conceptual as far as reflecting minimalist trends in the avant-garde, it represented an antithesis to the visual overkill of *Sgt. Pepper's* front cover. Hamilton recalled, "Paul McCartney requested the design be as stark a contrast to *Sgt. Pepper's* day-glo explosion as possible…. He got it!"[6] At one level, *The White Album* cover essentially replicated the generic cover of a demo, test pressing, or promotional copy as a satirical nod at anonymity given their stature. At another level, it presented the band as a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate in which the Beatles were, in effect, starting over musically and moving from psychedelic (post)modernism to a more self-conscious postmodernism.

## *Parody, Pastiche and Politics: The Postmodernism of* The White Album

This growing discontent within the Beatles paralleled increasing disillusionment and despair in the counterculture as 1968 became a year marked by assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F.

Kennedy, the war in Vietnam, and the election of Richard Nixon to the presidency. The Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia to crush democratic reform movements while in France spontaneous student and worker uprisings nearly toppled the government of Charles de Gaulle in May of 1968. Kenneth Gloag suggested

> 1968 saw the beginnings of the demise of the alternative optimism of the period, a demise that could be seen through any number of symbolic events…. The so-called *White Album* (1968) … [was] a significant rupture in the stylistic revolution of the Beatles. The progression from *Rubber Soul* (1965) to *Revolver* (1966) to *Sgt. Pepper* (1967) is one predicated on stylistic innovation and ambition, while the *White Album* presents a reaction against the drive towards unity in *Sgt. Pepper* and embraces a higher sense of difference/plurality which was implicit but often resisted in the earlier work, qualities which render it readily available to a postmodern perspective and which will come to be seen as part of a wider fragmentation of popular music styles.[7]

However, what Gloag termed the "higher sense of difference/plurality" on *The White Album* that lends itself to a postmodern perspective was criticized by Robert Christgau as a "pastiche of musical exercises."[8] Songs on *The White Album* careened across genres ranging from 1950s rock ("Back in the U.S.S.R." and "Birthday"), American folk ("Rocky Raccoon" and "The Continuing Adventures of Bungalow Bill"), country-western (with an added psychedelic element on "Don't Pass Me By"), English folk ("Blackbird" and "Mother Nature's Son"), doo-wop (perversely used to end "Happiness is a Warm Gun"), blues ("Why Don't We Do It in the Road?" and "Yer Blues"), ska ("Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da"), music hall ("Honey Pie," "Martha My Dear"), protest blues-folk rock ("Revolution 1"), hard rock ("Helter Skelter"), *musique concrète* ("Revolution 9"), and slushy MOR ("Good Night"). While Christgau criticized *The White Album* for, in effect, succumbing to the blank parody of postmodernism, Kenneth Womack argued *The White Album* was not simply a "pastiche of musical styles" but a concept album acting as a

> a self-consciously constructed song cycle that guides the listener from Cold War inspired "Back in the U.S.S.R." through the psychosexual "Happiness is a Warm Gun," the somber realities of "Blackbird," and the sheer terror of "Helter Skelter," *The White Album* pits our yearning for love, hope, and peace in sharp contrast with an increasingly postmodern void. Through parody, hyperbole, and bitter irony, *The White Album* tells the story, in dissonant and highly metaphorical fashion, of the sociocultural calamity the world experienced in 1968 [which] displaced the Summer of Love in 1967 with equal doses of alienation and uncertainty.[9]

The opening track, "Back in the U.S.S.R.," is a parody of Chuck Berry's "Back in the U.S.A," with a bridge that parodies the Beach Boys' "California Girls."[10] Moreover, the parody is reinforced by elements of noise: the sound of a jet plane taking off not only begins and ends the song but is periodically inserted into the mix throughout while the third verse is underscored by a grating one-note guitar lead.[11] As Womack argued, the Cold War context is central to the irony, converting the message of Chuck Berry's song as a celebration of the American Way into a satire of rock ideology's tenets of freedom and individuality where listening to rock music and living in a liberal democracy are synonymous. Conversely, "Back in the U.S.S.R." becomes a rock song satirically praising collectivization by any means necessary while it opens a sprawling album done by a band that was quickly losing its group identity as its members increasingly focused on their individual efforts and careers.

Womack raises a compelling argument that as parody rather than pastiche, *The White Album* was to the chaos of 1968 what *Sgt. Pepper* was to the Summer of Love in 1967. It is less convincing that given the factionalism and ill-will of the recordings sessions of *The White Album* gave way to a "self-consciously constructed song cycle."[12] Rather, the "song cycle" of *The White Album* could be described as dialectical rather than conceptual, exhibited the musical and political tensions developing between Lennon and McCartney. As far as the more overtly parodic songs, this can be roughly divided into the musically straightforward "light comedy" of McCartney's songs as overtly comical spoofs versus the musically skewed

“dark comedy” of Lennon’s songs which satirically turn the genres on their heads.

The American folk genre was parodied by McCartney on “Rocky Raccoon” and Lennon on “The Continuing Story of Bungalow Bill.” “Rocky Raccoon” begins with McCartney adopting a faux American “country hick” accent as he introduces the song and explains the premise that Rocky Raccoon, a young cowboy, is bent on challenging a romantic rival to a gunfight. After Rocky is wounded, he returns to his hotel room where he is “saved” not only physically but spiritually by reading the Bible. Lennon played harmonica and harmonium (replicating an accordion part) while the up-tempo bridge and ending featured Martin’s saloon-style piano and McCartney’s purposely silly scat singing. At one level, the song satirizes the genre conventions of the Western, its comical musical framework housing a lyrical realm of alcoholics (the town doctor), prostitutes (the saloon girl), and psychotic gunslingers (the title character) where salvation is mocked rather than affirmed. However, the potential black comedy of “Rocky Raccoon” is undermined by the overdetermined burlesquing of the performance, and ultimately the satire centers on spoofing genre clichés and conventions, down to forlorn harmonica and barroom piano, rather than Wild West ideology.

“Bungalow Bill” is a satirical sing-along campfire song which included back-up vocals by Maureen Starkey and Yoko Ono (who also sings a brief lead in one verse). The titular character’s name parodies “Buffalo Bill” Cody, but actually based on one Richard Cooke, a rich American who was at the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi’s spiritual retreat in India at the same time as the Beatles. Cooke took time out for a tiger hunt while seeking metaphysical enlightenment, an act Lennon found highly offensive. Counting in 2/4, the chorus is done in seven-bar progressions: C-G-C-Fm-C-Fm-G followed by A-E-A-Dm-A-Dm-E. The final progression holds the last E one additional bar to facilitate an incongruent transition to dirge verses in a much slower 4/4, intentionally bogged down by Starr’s leaden half-time drum beat layered with Mellotron. In these verses Lennon caustically and disdainfully describes the tiger hunt while the chorus with group vocals continually and tauntingly condemns Bungalow Bill as a cold-

blooded killer through satirizing the symbol of the great white hunter. In the context of 1968, the song inevitably becomes a commentary on Vietnam.

Blues was the source for both McCartney's "Why Don't We Do It in the Road?" and Lennon's "Yer Blues." As noted, "Road" was a McCartney solo track on which he played guitars, piano, and percussion with Starr later adding a drum part. It is simply a 12-bar blues in 4/4 with McCartney mostly shouting the title as the verses in a highly affected black voice. "Yer Blues" was recorded with the classic quartet line-up of Lennon and Harrison on guitars, McCartney on bass, and Starr on drums. Capped by Lennon's overwrought wailing and lyrics steeped in death and despair, the guitars are highly distorted and grind against each other while the verses stagger along in triple-meter (6/8, 12/8) while the bridge abruptly shifts to a 4/4 rave-up featuring two guitar solos: the first fairly monotonal and saturated with phase-shifting while the second meanders with a high-pitched fuzz effect.

On "Road," the case can be made that McCartney is commenting on the male chauvinism and sexism of popular music (i.e., "cock rock"), attitudes often sustained by predictable musical patterns and inane lyrics about the act of sex. On the other hand, McCartney can be accused of simply sending-up the dirtiness of the blues, and like "Rocky Raccoon" is merely content to spoof the genre to the point social commentary is rendered irrelevant. At worst, "Road" can come off as unintentionally racist and a counterculture minstrel show version of the blues.[13] In contrast, the much more oppressive "Yer Blues" which does not so much rock but unsteadily lumbers amid a tangle of electric guitars and changing meters. Rather than a parody of the blues/hard rock bands popular at the time (e.g., Cream), "Yer Blues" acts as a sly parody of white blues as a whole and as Amiri Baraka (a.k.a. LeRoi Jones) wrote in *Blues People*, "The idea of a white blues singer seems an even more violent contradiction in terms than the idea a middle-class blues singer."

To be sure, the parody of *The White Album* was more subtle compared to the concurrent work of Frank Zappa, whose satire was so overt and often heavy-handed musically as well as lyrically that it left little doubt as to intent and interpretation, be it the vaudeville of "Bow Tie Daddy," the doo-

wop of “What’s the Ugliest Part of Your Body?,” or the psychedelic rock of “Absolutely Free” or “The Idiot Bastard Son” from the Mothers of Invention’s *We’re Only in It for the Money*, a satirical concept album mocking the counterculture Zappa devised in specific response to *Sgt. Pepper* released several months before *The White Album*. In discussing the question of parody versus pastiche through comparing Zappa and the Beatles, David Brackett suggested

> One of the earliest examples of material that veered on pastiche due to its extreme eclecticism is Frank Zappa’s work in the late 1960s with the Mothers of Invention, although his stylistic allusions were exaggerated enough to conjure up a sense of parody. A clearer example of pastiche is [*The White Album*]…. Some were straightforward parody, such as “Back in the U.S.S.R.,” but many other tracks lacked an obvious satirical impulse. Was “Yer Blues” a parody of blues revivalists or a heartfelt utterance in blues form? Was “Good Night” a spoof or a nostalgic glimpse back at the “light” music of the Beatles’ childhood? Was “Revolution No. 9” serious avant-garde electronic music experiment or a throwaway designed to deflate pompous pop artists?[14]

### *The Three Faces of Revolution: “Revolution 1,” “Revolution,” and “Revolution 9”*

Ultimately, the criticism surrounding *The White Album* extended beyond the question of whether or not the parody transcended pastiche but whether or not parody was even sufficient to address the political turmoil of 1968. The blues genre also figured prominently on Lennon’s “Revolution,” arguably the Beatles’ most overtly political song. *The White Album* version, titled “Revolution 1,” was actually the first version recorded and done as a slow shuffle with a “loose” feel or, less charitably put, an overall sloppy performance. The predominant acoustic guitar and a brass section were punctuated by jagged electric guitar accents and mock doo-wop background vocals. Michael Wood argued these backing vocals satirized the song’s overt message that idealist-pacifist means produce socially harmonious

ends and the song's internal debate over political change through violence was "all part of the political crap [the Beatles] dislike so much."[15] Lennon was adamant that the song be released as a single, in large part because he believed the Beatles needed to directly and publicly address the political unrest of the era, whether satirically or sincerely. McCartney and Harrison were opposed more on the ground they felt "Revolution 1" was simply not strong enough musically to be a single as well as any potential backlash they song might generate.

Whether a compromise or a way to placate Lennon, the Beatles recorded a second version titled "Revolution" released as the B-side to McCartney's ballad "Hey Jude" where the extended sing-along coda "drew the song's focus from personal relationships to the larger bonds of community and civilization."[16] "Revolution" was considerably faster and shorter than "Revolution 1" with much more emphasis on heavily distorted electric guitars, the result of running them through overdriven preamps and directly into the mixing board which could have potentially damaged the specific channels if not the entire recording console. Lennon's lead vocal is also more strident and "Revolution" dispenses with the (parodic) doo-wop backing vocals on "Revolution 1." There was also a key lyrical change in the first verse so the ambivalent stance towards violence in "Revolution 1" was replaced by a categorical rejection of violence in "Revolution" to emphasize Lennon's vision of global *non-violent* social revolution (i.e., "All You Need is Love" or "Give Peace a Chance").[17] At other points, the lyrics criticized intellectuals advocating direct action and Maoists.

Unfortunately for the Beatles, "Hey Jude/Revolution" was released on August 26, 1968, two days before the infamous "police riot" at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago where scores of protesters were beaten and tear-gassed by law enforcement with the news footage shown across international television. In that "Revolution" addressed the growing crisis in the counterculture by rejecting violence as a potential tactic yet alone viable solution, John Weiner recounted

> The New Left and the underground press responded almost immediately. The Berkeley *Barb* wrote with typical excess, "'Revolution' sounds like the hawk plank adopted in the Chicago

> Convention of the Democratic Death Party." "Hubert Humphrey couldn't have said it better," Jon Landau agreed. *Ramparts* called the song a "betrayal"; the *New Left Review* called it "a lamentable petty bourgeois cry of fear."[18]

In contrast, Establishment mainstay *Time* (September 6, 1968) hailed "Revolution" as "a blast of exhilarating hard rock … addressed to radical activists the world over. Their message will surprise some, disappoint others, and move many: cool it." It was presumably not the reception Lennon intended.

Moreover, the Rolling Stones released their hit single "Street Fighting Man" less than a week later (August 31, 1968), three days *after* the Chicago DNC police riot. The Left was much more enamored with the Stones' revolutionary machismo and ostensible support for direct action. Liberation News Service ran a story with the unironic headline "LNS Supports the Rolling Stones in Ideological Split with the Beatles."[19] Taking the New Left line of championing the Rolling Stones over the Beatles, and more specifically the Stones' *Beggars' Banquet* released a couple of weeks after *The White Album*, Jon Landau claimed that "the Beatles satirize and parody the fringes of contemporary life … precisely because they were afraid of confronting reality. It becomes a mask where they can hide behind the urgencies of the moment…. The Stones' strike for realism in contrast to the Beatles' fantasies."[20] However, Jeffery Roessner countered

> The criticism of [*The White Album*] from the New Left generally centered on the charge that the eclectic style and self-consciousness of the record were means of eluding the pressing political concerns of the times. This argument resembles the Marxist position of Fredric Jameson…. Such an argument, however, assumes that there is one way of being political and fails to consider the context, or the specific historical circumstances, that give any use of parody its particular significance. By 1968 … the Beatles found themselves lauded in highbrow art circles because of their masterpiece *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*…. The Beatles' turn to parody serves not as escape from but a specific response to key cultural tensions: the self-reflexivity and ironic appropriation of various styles … allowed the

> Beatles to contest the commodification of rock music even as they helped redefine the relationship between artistic style and political relevance.[21]

Another defense of "Revolution" came from Greil Marcus, who argued that "there is a message in the music which is more powerful than anyone's words…. There is freedom and movement in the music even as there is sterility and repression in the lyrics…. The music doesn't say 'cool it' or 'don't fight the cops' … the music dodges the message and comes out on top."[22] Here Marcus raises a crucial issue in that meaning is constructed by the music and one can go further in reversing Marcus' argument to suggest popular music, including rock, can offer freedom and movement in the lyrics and sterility and repression in the music (e.g., arena rock anthems like Night Ranger's "You Can Still Rock in America," released in 1982 corresponding with the apex of Reaganism).

In this respect, a song on *The White Album* that equally, perhaps even more effectively, represented the crises of 1968 was McCartney's "Helter Skelter." To be sure, the lyrics are not social commentary but typical McCartney fare as a fairly literal description of a day in a playground cavorting on a large slide. Moreover, McCartney's main motivation was the public perception he was the "pop" side of the Beatles and a desire to write a song that proved to be the most abrasive rock number the Beatles produced up to that point. Musically, "Helter Skelter" is a collision of thrashing half-time drums, discordant and distorted guitars, and McCartney screaming as much as singing the lyrics. While "Revolution" posited a forthcoming unity as far as social change, "Helter Skelter" signified a chaotic and overwhelming sense of falling apart occurring throughout the world politically and, not unrelated, the falling apart of the Beatles as a working band and the counterculture dream they represented. If "Revolution" was utopian, "Helter Skelter" was apocalyptic.[23]

Whether or not directly motivated by the immediate and intense criticism of "Revolution" from the Left, a revised version of "Revolution" was soon after released in the promotional film for the song. Filmed at Twinkenham Studios, the Beatles were seen doing a full band performance of the song, although the Beatles were miming to the single version on their instruments

with live vocals in order to add the missing elements of the "Revolution 1" version. Lennon expressed the more ambivalent view of political violence in the first verse while McCartney and Harrison added the doo-wop background vocals which could be taken as a satirical send-up of the song's overtly political message. The film was shown on *Top of the Pops* (September, 19, 1968) and in the U.S. debuted on *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* (October 13, 1968), a fairly orthodox comedy-variety show that by 1968 became a lightning rod for controversy over its counterculture sympathies and left-leaning political commentary, in particular opposition to the war in Vietnam.[24]

The most controversial and even infamous song in Beatles' history, *The White Album*'s penultimate track was "Revolution 9," Lennon's ambitious *musique concrète* composition with assistance from Harrison and Ono, which runs 8:22 and consists entirely of "noise." An array of tape edits and loops were made out of numerous sources including voices (Lennon, Ono, Harrison, and Martin), a cacophonous jam session that ended one take of "Revolution 1," and snippets of classical music recordings (Sibelius, Schulman, and Vaughan Williams, among others). More specifically, as a signifier of bourgeois culture, classical music was cannibalized into fragments and used to construct an oppositional piece of noise/music. Sound effects ranging from crowds in stadiums, gunfire, glass shattering, and other sundry noises were also incorporated. Moreover, studio composition was utilized to incorporate distortion, echo, fading, reverb, tape speed manipulation, and the use of backwards tracks.

Lennon adamantly insisted it be included on *The White Album* despite the objections of the other Beatles and Martin, given that Lennon was afforded the opportunity to release experimental music solo projects at will on Apple Records. While Lennon prevailed, "Revolution 9" was regulated to the last half of side four. In other words, the running order of the "song cycle" effectively cued the listener that once "Revolution 9" began the Beatles' music on *The White Album* was effectively over. While frequently derided as unlistenable and self-indulgent, as a sound *montage*—as opposed to a sound *collage*—"Revolution 9" functioned as an aural representation of 1968 and an effective piece of political music. Ian MacDonald contented that if one compares and contrasts "Lennon's work with Luigi Nono's

similar *Non consumiamo Marx* ([*Do Not Consume Marx*], 1969) … ["Revolution 9" is] much more aesthetically and politically acute…. Nono's piece entirely lacks the pop-bred sense of texture and proportion."[25]

However, what was equally political was with "Revolution 9" the Beatles—or at least Lennon—introduced theoretical music on a Beatles' album without qualifying it through mass music (e.g., "A Day in the Life"). As Peter Amis Carlin noted,

> [Lennon's] allegiance with Yoko had not only awakened his confidence, but inspired him to apply her anarchistic aesthetic to the Beatles' new works. No longer willing to be cowed by Paul's unrelenting professionalism, John was now intent on driving the band towards a rock and roll nihilism that would detonate their pop image once and for all…. When Paul brought the loops into the studio, it was in the service of actual, recognizable songs. "Tomorrow Never Knows" had challenged pop-music form…. But it had a melody and verses … it was music, not finger-in-the-eye provocation.[26]

In this regard, if "Revolution 9" was a sound document/editorial chronicling the noise of 1968 *The White Album*'s final track "Good Night" functioned as a satirical coda directed at the Establishment, informing them the "good old days" were over by using their own MOR music against them. Originally written by Lennon as a straightforward lullaby for his infant son, the only Beatle appearing on the song was Starr; he lazily crooned the lyrics although his slightly off-key baritone was relatively buried in the mix under a schmaltzy orchestral accompaniment. In terms of the parody that permeated *The White Album* and especially following the assault of "Revolution 9," Ian MacDonald noted that "['Good Night'] could hardly help but be heard as nastily ironic…. George Martin's adroitly treacly arrangement (Lennon: 'possibly over lush') makes the most of this, complete with knowing winks at Hollywood."[27]

As far as the Beatles' internal politics, "Good Night" could also be heard as Lennon's swipe at McCartney's appreciation of older musical genres like music-hall and Tin Pan Alley, influences that resulted in what Lennon derisively called McCartney's "granny music" songs. In turn, *The White*

*Album* included McCartney's "Wild Honey Pie," a minute-long collection of cartoonish sound effects and mechanistic rhythms over which McCartney chanted the last two words of the title in electronically modified voices. "Wild Honey Pie" can be heard as McCartney's parodic response to Lennon's "serious" avant-garde/experimental music projects and, more broadly, a satire on avant-garde/experimental music. To reconfigure David Brackett's assessment of the ambiguity of "Revolution 9," on *The White Album* "Wild Honey Pie" acts as the "throwaway designed to deflate pompous pop artists" while "Revolution 9" was "serious avant-garde electronic music" with an equally serious political message. Indeed, "Revolution 9" was also the introduction to a musical-political project Lennon pursued for the remainder of the decade with Yoko Ono.

# 4

## One Bad Apple

### John Lennon, Yoko Ono and the Avant-Garde Turn

> They got involved with each other and were obviously into each other to such a degree that they thought everything they said or did was of world importance, so they made it into records.[1]
>
> —George Harrison

### *When John Met Yoko*

Near the end of 1968, Apple Records officially began operations with the release of *The White Album* and two other albums. One was George Harrison's first solo album *Wonderwall Music*, his soundtrack for the film *Wonderwall*—largely a collection of instrumentals veering from rock, orchestral, Indian music, and Americana genres (i.e., country, ragtime, honky-tonk). The other was John Lennon and Yoko Ono's avant-garde/experimental music project *Unfinished Music No. 1: Two Virgins*. A well-known avant-garde artist affiliated with the Fluxus movement, Ono's more famous work included *Cut Piece* (1964), a performance art piece in which the audience was invited on-stage to cut off her clothes with scissors while *Grapefruit* (1964) was an instruction book of "event scores" such as "Blood Piece."

> Blood Piece
>
> Use your blood to paint.
> Keep painting until you faint. (a)

Keep painting until you die. (b)

Ono's first London exhibit was held in late 1966 at the Indica Gallery, a venue Paul McCartney helped sponsor and Lennon was among those attending. Intrigued if not overly impressed with Ono's work, they began corresponding and Lennon eventually sponsored Ono's exhibition at London's Lisson Gallery in the fall of 1967. Ono also did a performance art piece as part of "The 14 Hour Technicolor Dream" festival (Alexandra Palace, April 29, 1967) which included performances by Soft Machine and Pink Floyd; in February of 1968 she performed with Ornette Coleman at Royal Albert Hall with an excerpt of a rehearsal tape released as "AOS" on *Yoko Ono/Plastic Ono Band* (1970).

In May of 1968, Lennon and Ono recorded *Two Virgins* in a single night that also marked the beginning of their romantic relationship.[2] While divided into twelve parts, *Two Virgins* is essentially one continuous improvised piece with the constant being tape loops of whistling bird noises. Ono periodically sang-screamed wordless vocals while Lennon alternated between operating the loops, effects, and playing guitar, percussion, or piano. The two also exchanged several impromptu asides, comments and jokes during the performance. The only melodic moment of *Two Virgins* is a segment (at approximately seven minutes) where Lennon plays a music hall-type melody on piano, which could be heard as a sardonic swipe at McCartney's music-hall influences. Moreover, over the course of *Two Virgins* two old records are played amid the din constructed by Lennon and Ono, "Together" (at approximately nine minutes) and "Hushabye Hushabye" (at approximately eighteen minutes). They represent anachronistic "old time" music of the older generation being subsumed and destroyed by the noise of the 1960s, a similar strategy of concluding *The White Album* with the *musique concrète* of "Revolution 9" that included tape loops of classical music recordings followed by the MOR send-up of "Good Night."

More so than the album itself, controversy ensued over *Two Virgins*' cover art: a front cover full-frontal nude photo of Lennon and Ono with the back cover a similar photo of the naked duo taken from behind showing their buttocks. In order to put a Beatles "seal of approval" on *Two Virgins*,

Lennon asked McCartney to contribute a liner note which read "When two great Saints meet, it is a humbling experience. The long battles to prove he was a saint." McCartney later recounted it was simply a random quote taken from a *Sunday Express* article he used as a "found object" for the album cover but apparently not aware that it would appear on the bottom of the front cover, yet alone below Lennon and Ono *au naturel*. Barry Miles recounted,

> The other Beatles were horrified, not because they were shocked by the nakedness, but because they thought the sleeve would damage the Beatles as a group…. Most of the public still regarded them as four nice lads from Liverpool. The *Two Virgins* cover blew that image right out of the water. It was perhaps an unconscious effort to sabotage the Beatles, John's first move to set himself free.[3]

The cover caused immediate problems with Apple's fledgling relationship with EMI/Capitol, who agreed to press *Two Virgins* but refused to distribute it due to the cover. The head of EMI, Sir Joe Lockwood, curtly informed Lennon after he complained of record company censorship, "Well, I should find some better bodies to put on the cover than you two. They're not very attractive."[4] EMI's decision forced Apple to contract with small independent labels to stock the album (Tetragrammaton Records in the U.S., Track Records in the U.K.). Moreover, in order to avoid potential obscenity charges, *Two Virgins* was released in a brown paper wrapper with holes showing Lennon and Ono's faces and the back of the wrapper was embossed with lines from Genesis 2: 21–5 ending with "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed." This lead to further controversy and accusations the Bible was being misappropriated by hippies to promote smut, harkening back to Lennon's highly controversial comment in 1966 that the Beatles were "more popular than Jesus."

Beyond the avant-grade/experimental music, the record cover wrapper made as much of a strategic effort to reveal the "star" faces as to conceal the full-frontal nudity. The potential buyer was initially informed that what they were purchasing was, in fact, a product by a Beatle, although the shock effect was not only unwrapping the album to see a fairly unflattering photo of Lennon and Ono naked but the fact that *Two Virgins* was thirty minutes

of noise produced by voices, musical instruments, and non-musical sources rather than a collection of songs. As Richard Leppert noted,

> New art (by which Adorno means avant-garde art) insists on the reality, and centrality of the gap between what art proffers—a glimpse of what is actually out of reach—and what audiences increasingly have come to expect from art, namely that the gap can be closed by experiencing art. New Art … refuses to deliver the package that art consumers believe they have bought. Or to construct the metaphor a bit differently, when the package is opened what's there is notably not what was ordered.[5]

Following the disastrous *Get Back* sessions in early 1969, the Beatles largely went their separate ways, occasionally regrouping at intervals to complete their unofficial farewell album *Abbey Road* (events discussed next chapter). Lennon most overtly pursued a solo career with further experimental music collaborations with Ono, *Unfinished Music No. 2: Life with the Lions* and *Wedding Album* (both 1969).[6] In November 1968, Ono suffered a late-term miscarriage and a photo of Ono in her hospital bed and Lennon lying beside her on the floor on a sleeping bag served as *Life with the Lions*' front cover. The title was a pun on a popular British sitcom *Life with the Lyons* while at the same time an act of "self-lionization" as Lennon and Ono became immersed in political activism. The back cover was an October 1968 press photo of Lennon and Ono surrounded by police as they were being released from jail following their arrest for hashish possession. Hence, the front cover depicted Lennon and Ono in the aftermath of private personal tragedy and the back cover represented them as public enemies of the State: two representations of the couple that were not mutually exclusive. For added measure, the oblique McCartney liner notes on *Two Virgins* were replaced by a terse "'No Comment'—George Martin" to emphasize *Life with the Lions*, unlike *Two Virgins*, was not Beatle endorsed product.

Side one of *Life with the Lions* was "Cambridge 1969," a free improvised piece lasting almost a half-hour recorded live at a free jazz festival at Cambridge University on March 2, 1969. It consisted of Ono warbling and screeching—descriptions not meant pejoratively—while Lennon provided

guitar feedback along with contributions from saxophonist John Tchicai and percussionist John Stevens in the latter stages of the performance. Lennon recounted that "I went with her and tried to be the instrument and not project—to just be her band, like Ike Turner to Tina, only her Tina was a different, avant-garde Tina—well, even some of the jazz guys got upset."[7] However, event coordinator Anthony Barnett contended the problem was not "the jazz guys" but Lennon and Ono.

> The idea behind the concert was that everyone should play together, but halfway through [Lennon and Ono] rather took over for their own purposes. Eventually other musicians grew tired of that and started to reappear on stage…. The track ("Cambridge 1969") was in no way a reflection of the concert as a whole…. In my view, Lennon was trying to show-off and be more avant-garde than anyone in avant-garde music.[8]

(In fairness to Lennon and Ono, Tchicai's account differs from Barrett. "The concert was in two halves—the first half consisting of John and Yoko, the second was various jazz improvisers. At the end of our set they said, 'If you would like to join us for some improvisation, please do,' and that is what appears on the record."[9])

Side two of *Life with the Lions* consisted of four shorter pieces and two recorded on a cassette player in Ono's hospital room after her miscarriage. "No Bed for Beatle John" was a rather pretty and funny acapella piece with Ono, accompanied by Lennon in the background, chanting/singing press accounts verbatim of Ono's hospitalization as well as the controversy over the *Two Virgins* cover. "Baby's Heartbeat" was an echoed tape loop of a recording Lennon made of the unborn child's heartbeat shortly before Ono miscarried. It was followed by the self-explanatory "Two Minutes Silence," a two minute gap between "Baby's Heartbeat" and the final track "Radio Play," twelve minutes of (presumably) Ono rapidly adjusting the tuning and volume dials of a radio while Lennon made a phone call in the background. "Two Minutes Silence" was done as homage to Cage's *4'33"*; however, in the context of *Life with the Lions* it also acted as a solemn "moment of silence" for their deceased child. In turn, "Radio Play" became an additional homage to Cage, specifically *Imaginary Landscape No. 4*.

Within a few months of *Life with the Lions*, Lennon and Ono released *Wedding Album* in an extravagant box that included (among other items) a reproduction of their marriage certificate, a booklet of news stories about the couple, and a photo of a slice of their wedding cake. Due to the elaborate packaging, *Wedding Album* cost a whopping $10.00 at a time when most records sold for substantially less (for example, *Two Virgins* carried a list price of $1.98). Side One of *Wedding Album* was "John and Yoko," an echoed tape loop of Lennon and Ono's heartbeats with the two repeating each other's names in a range of whispers, chants, and screams—all treated with reverb, echo, and other effects and each voice isolated on each side of the stereo channels (Lennon on the right, Ono on the left). Side Two was "Amsterdam," recorded during Lennon and Ono's honeymoon "Bed-In" at the Amsterdam Hilton Hotel (March 25–31, 1969) in which various conversations, interviews, singing, speeches, and other sounds were edited into a sound montage.[10] In this respect, "Amsterdam" chronicles the couple's honeymoon as a platform for their political activism (or vice versa), while "John and Yoko" can be heard as a representation of the couple having sex—again, not necessarily mutual exclusive representations as the personal and political life of Lennon and Ono became one and the same.[11]

### *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Revolutionary*

> The most fantastic thing in the world was not to be a rock star, but a revolutionary.
>
> —Astrid Proll, former member of the Red Army Faction

In the late 1960s, the possibility of revolution in Western society was not simply powerful rhetoric but a potential reality. However, from the perspective of orthodox Marxism, the revolution was not emerging from the dynamics of class struggle. Especially in the anti–Communism of the Cold War era, the working class was increasingly viewed as part of the problem and not the solution. Rather, revolutionary movements were manifest as a generational struggle of disenfranchised young people and minorities with

artists assuming a crucial role as the vanguard of the revolutionary movements. One might say V.I. Lenin was being replaced by John Lennon.[12]

Despite the levels of self-importance and self-indulgence, there was more than unrestrained ego-tripping in Lennon and Ono's musical-political project. While McCartney may have spurred the Beatles into some avant-garde/experimental territory with *Sgt. Pepper*, it was Lennon and Ono who concertedly used the avant-garde for the express purposes of confrontation and advocating political change. Lennon was also a rock star and co-owner of a record company with substantial capital to fund his forays into avant-garde/experimental music and political activism, money generated by the Beatles while Lennon self-consciously and increasingly positioned himself away from and even against the Beatles by assuming the role of the revolutionary artist in spectacle society.

Increasingly committed to left-wing political activism, Lennon and Ono recorded "Give Peace a Chance" at their second Bed-In for Peace in Montreal at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel (May 25 to June 1, 1969) with assorted counterculture luminaries and Tom Smothers playing guitar on the track with Lennon; the B-side "Remember Love" was an acoustic ballad sung by Ono in her idiosyncratic style. Released by Apple in early July as the Plastic Ono Band, "Give Peace a Chance" reached No. 2 in the British charts, the Top 20 in the U.S., and became an unofficial anthem for the anti–Vietnam war movement. As well as being the first hit song by a Beatle as a solo effort not officially released as a Beatles' song—in that "Yesterday" was effectively a Paul McCartney solo song—it was Lennon's most vociferous propaganda song to date. It was also anything but avant-garde compared to the *Unfinished Music* albums, with the verses delivered in a kind of stream-of-consciousness rap and a sing-along chorus: it compared much better to Bob Dylan than John Cage.

In between the Montreal "Bed-In" and "Give Peace a Chance" hitting the singles chart, on June 14, 1969, Lennon and Ono appeared as guests on the syndicated talk-show *The David Frost Show* which Lennon used as a podium to pontificate on culture and politics as well as promote *Life with the Lions.* When Frost broached the issue that *Life with the Lions* also

seemed intent on "immortalizing" Lennon and Ono, Lennon reaffirmed his goal was not simply selling albums but "selling peace" and changing mass consciousness towards a more positive view of human nature. After Frost questioned the idealism and feasibility of Lennon's stance by bringing up Adolf Hitler and World War II, a visibly aggravated Lennon sidestepped the issue by stating he was less interested in the past and more interested changing the present system and contributing to a better future where no person would grow up to become a Hitler and no one would ever choose to support a Hitler. In other words, the question of whether singing "Give Peace a Chance" could have effectively prevented global war was left unanswered, or simply dodged.

While Frost raised valid points, it was not so much Lennon and Ono "immortalizing" their public image, but self-consciously constructing a "myth" around themselves through their records and activism as revolutionary leaders, figures whose art and whose politics were inseparable, and individuals who were not simply committed to changing the world but *saving* the world. In the spectacle society where they were "selling peace," Lennon and Ono seemed quite at ease playing the role of revolutionary artists. In a situationist-style form of activism, in November 1969—by which time Lennon privately informed the other Beatles and management he was quitting the band—he made headlines for publically renouncing his Medal of the British Empire, originally given to him personally by Queen Elizabeth with the rest of the Beatles in 1965. Delivered by courier to Buckingham Palace, the MBE was accompanied by Lennon's handwritten note: "Your Majesty, I am returning my MBE as a protest against Britain's involvement in the Nigeria-Biafra thing, against our support of America in Vietnam, and against 'Cold Turkey' slipping off the charts. With love, John Lennon of Bag." (To note, Lennon and Ono had recently started a public relations firm, Bag Productions, Ltd., as an additional method to "sell peace"; the note was written on Bag Productions' official stationary so protest and self-promotion became inherently connected.) On December 23, 1969, Lennon and Ono met with Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau as part of their "sell peace" activism, which signified their celebrity impact if not necessarily their actual influence as far as current world politics.[13]

### *The Plastic Ono Band*

In December of 1968, Lennon and Ono performed as "the Dirty Mac" with Eric Clapton (guitar), Keith Richards (bass), and Mitch Mitchell (drums) for *The Rolling Stones Rock and Roll Circus*, a planned BBC TV special which never aired.[14] Lennon, Clapton, Richards, and Mitchell performed "Yer Blues" from *The White Album* and then a 12-bar blues improvisation "Whole Lotta Yoko" joined by Ono and classical violinist Ivry Gitlis. While Gitlis offered unadventurous blues-jazz-country licks, Ono engaged in her free-from vocal style encompassing a range from whispers and shrieks. In fact, Ono's vocals are the only thing that pushed the Dirty Mac into any avant-garde territory; without her presence, the music amounts to a blues jam topped off with some fiddle. Nonetheless, "Whole Lotta Yoko" was arguably the first performance by what later became known as the Plastic Ono Band.

Ono's decidedly unorthodox vocal style utilizing chants, moans, screams, and whispers: tactics rock critics dismissed as abrasive and annoying vocal caterwaul designed to conceal a complete lack of tonal singing ability couched in avant-garde pretense. Ono recounted the impact of modern classical and Eastern music on her singing:

> There are so many ways of using the throat and vocal cords, you can use different areas, different parts of the body to express different emotions. As far as influences in my singing, I got a lot from (Alban) Berg's operas, like his *Lulu*…. There's a lot of Japanese kabuki influence, from the old Japanese way of singing. There's one particular kabuki singing style called *hetai*, a kind of storytelling from that's almost like chanting and requires you to strain your voice a bit. I also listened to tapes of my voice playing backwards and tried to make sounds like that. And I listened to Tibetan singing, Indian singing…. All that mixed.[15]

Here another musical influence that could be cited is the vocal style of early rock and roll and especially soul music, which frequently employ non-

verbal vocal sounds to convey "meaning." As Simon Frith argued, "In black music, singers articulate awe and fervor through an apparently spontaneous struggle *against* words … [and it] can only be described in terms of sound, not *what* is sung but *how* it is sung."[16] While it may amount to heresy as far as orthodox rock criticism, Ono's vocal style can be heard as traditionalist as far as being an extension and exaggeration of Elvis Presley's moans, Little Richard's shouts, James Brown's screams, or Otis Redding's grunts.

Following the completion of *Abbey Road*, and the Beatles' disbanding becoming all but inevitable, Lennon was asked to emcee the Toronto Rock and Roll Revival festival on September 13, 1969, a concert whose line-up ranged from Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis to the Doors and Alice Cooper. Instead, Lennon offered to perform with Ono and his "new band," the Plastic Ono Band, and quickly recruited Eric Clapton on guitar, bassist Klaus Voorman, and drummer Alan White; the performance was recorded and soon after released on Apple as *Live Peace in Toronto 1969*. The set began with three covers of Fifties songs—"Blue Suede Shoes," "Money (That's What I Want)," and "Dizzy Miss Lizzy"—followed by the Beatles' song "Yer Blues" and Lennon's two singles," the yet-unreleased "Cold Turkey" and his hit "Give Peace a Chance." The final two songs featured Ono's trademark vocal wails and moved into avant-garde territory: the blues-based minimalism of "Don't Worry Kyoko (Mummy's Only Looking for Her Hand in the Snow)" and the almost-thirteen minute "John John (Let's Hope for Peace)" with copious guitar feedback supplied by Lennon and Clapton (cf. "Cambridge 1969"). Despite the mixed reception—the crowd was particularly adverse to the latter half of the set featuring Ono—the experience convinced Lennon to quit the Beatles although his departure was kept secret for various business reasons (discussed next chapter).

"Cold Turkey," a song about Lennon's bout with heroin abuse and withdrawal, was offered to the Beatles during the course of the *Abbey Road* sessions, but McCartney rejected it due to its subject matter. Instead, Lennon recorded it backed by Clapton, Starr, and Voorman. Released as a single scarcely a month after *Abbey Road* and before the *Live Peace* version, Lennon was listed as the sole songwriter and the performance credited to the Plastic Ono Band. A blues-rock song in which the vocals and distorted guitar riffs engaged in a stop-start, call and response over Starr's

backbeat, “Cold Turkey” typified the stark, angular shift in Lennon’s style that decidedly rejected the psychedelic accoutrements ca. *Sgt. Pepper* and *Magical Mystery Tour*. Even more unsettling was the B-side, a studio version of “Don’t Worry, Kyoko (Mummy’s Only Looking for Her Hand in the Snow”), a song inspired by Ono’s custody battle with Anthony Cox over her daughter Kyoko. Dispensing with standard 12-bar blues structure, “Kyoko” was a continually repeated, two-bar blues riff by which the standard and predictable tonal changes of the blues were negated. While the *Live Peace* version of “Kyoko” drags somewhat due to Alan White’s adherence to a rigid half-time beat, in the studio version the 4/4 meter was frequently jeopardized by Starr’s pounding beat emphasizing rolls and fills. In both versions, the piercing slide guitar glissandos and jagged strumming act as startling punctuations rather than stable “parts” while Ono’s chanting and periodic shrieks manifest a combined sense of desperation and determination.[17]

In December of 1969 Lennon played the Lyceum as part of a UNICEF benefit with an expanded all-star Plastic Ono Band line-up that included (among others) Harrison, Clapton, Billy Preston, and Keith Moon. Lennon also skipped the final recording sessions for *Let It Be* in January of 1970 in favor of recording his third solo single “Instant Karma!” Released in February 1970, it was credited to “Lennon/Ono with the Plastic Ono Band” and included musical backing from Harrison as well as Ono, Voorman, White, and Preston. As per other Plastic Ono Band singles, the B-side featured Ono singing lead, a chamber-folk ballad “Who Has Seen the Wind?” Lennon coaxed Phil Spector into producing the recording sessions and utilized his trademark “wall of sound” approach with multiple overdubs on “Instant Karma!”: a second drum track that gave the song a disorganized yet martial feel, several pianos, and the impromptu recruitment of nearby night clubs patrons to come to the studio and sing back-up in the chorus. To promote the release, the Plastic Ono Band recorded two performances for airing on *Tops of the Pops*. One immediate shock of the TV broadcast was Lennon and Ono’s new look in that both had shorn much of their hair, which they planned to auction in order to raise money for their “sell peace” campaign. Adding an element of performance art, Ono held up placards in one version and knitted in the other; in both versions, she wore a blindfold made from a sanitary napkin as a feminist statement: one assumes BBC

censors failed to notice. Although the Beatles had yet to officially disband, from the vantage point of Lennon's career moves from 1968 to 1970 they were already becoming a distant memory.

# 5

## Breaking Up Is Hard to Do

*Abbey Road* (1969) and *Let It Be* (1970)

Q: Did you miss George Martin and the other Beatles [recording *McCartney*]?

A: No.

Q: Are you planning a new album or single with the Beatles?

A: No.

Q: Do you foresee a time when Lennon-McCartney becomes an active songwriting partnership again?

A: No.

—Paul McCartney, press release, April 9, 1970

### *The Beginning of the End:* Abbey Road

In 1968, the Beatles "starred" in the feature-length animated film *Yellow Submarine*, a film heavy on psychedelic and Pop Art images, a plethora of Beatles' songs, and dialog supplied by actors instead of the Beatles themselves. In fact, the Beatles only appeared in the brief live-action conclusion, a sing-along titled "All Together Now"—a highly ironic gesture considering the band was slowly and acrimoniously collapsing. While a much more extravagant and inspired project, *Yellow Submarine* was not dissimilar to *The Beatles* cartoon show concurrently airing on ABC Saturday

mornings. The key difference was not only a feature-length theatrical film versus a half-hour TV show, but the counterculture/post–*Sgt. Pepper* Beatles being depicted in *Yellow Submarine* as opposed to the mop-top image maintained on *The Beatles*. Ultimately, the film required the release of some sort of companion soundtrack album, and at the time the Beatles were generally opposed to re-releasing material on the grounds it amounted to charging fans twice for the same song. *Yellow Submarine* consisted of two reissued hits ("Yellow Submarine" and "All You Need Is Love") and four unreleased songs from the film culled from previous recording sessions: Harrison's "Only a Northern Song" and "It's All Too Much" along with McCartney's "All Together Now" were recorded between February and May of 1967 (ca. *Sgt. Pepper*/*MMT*) and Lennon's "Hey Bulldog" in early1968 (ca. *The White Album*). The second side was orchestral music with some psychedelic embellishments written for the film by George Martin. The upshot was that music consumers paid full-album price for four "new" Beatles songs.

In early 1969, McCartney proposed a new rebranding of the Beatles around a "back to basics" plan of simpler songs, ensemble performance, and possibly resuming live concerts; Lennon countered the Beatles might be an exhausted endeavor and instead simply disband—a move McCartney understood from a business standpoint could have proven disastrous for the financially struggling Apple Corps.[1] They agreed that the next Beatles effort would be a live album of new material, a TV documentary chronicling the rehearsals, and a theatrical film of the "comeback" concert to complete their United Artists contractual requirement in that the band's minimal involvement on *Yellow Submarine* was deemed insufficient by UA. (One assumes that UA also saw the opportunity to squeeze another, potentially lucrative Beatles film out of the band; in short, leveraging a fourth film out of the three-picture deal.) This entailed minimizing if not completely forsaking overdubbing and other forms of studio composition in favor of songs that could easily transition from studio to stage; for example, "One After 909" was resurrected from the Beatles' early 1960s repertoire. In the process, George Martin's role as far as arrangements and production would be severely reduced to the point of becoming a glorified engineer.

Michael Lindsay-Hogg, who directed several of the Beatles' promotional films and *Rock and Roll Circus*, was brought in but the project quickly

proved to be a disaster. Early sessions captured on camera revealed the Beatles had little remaining common ground as musicians and even friends. McCartney alternated between playing the irrepressible class clown and the overbearing head coach in front of the camera while micromanaging behind the camera to the point of dictating Martin's production and Lindsay-Hogg's direction. Meanwhile, the other three Beatles sat with expressions reminiscent of miserable office workers watching the clock. Tensions were particularly revealed in a terse on-camera discussion between Harrison and McCartney over Harrison's guitar playing on "Two of Us." After a heated dispute with Lennon, on January 10 Harrison quit the band but some days later agreed to rejoin under several conditions.[2] One was relocating from Twickenham Film Studio to Apple Studio in the basement of Apple's office building. However, the Beatles needed to borrow recording equipment from EMI as Apple Studio was so poorly designed and constructed by Yanni "Magic Alex" Madras—who promised technological innovations ranging from a 72-track board to soundproofing via force-fields—that it was completely useless.[3] Second was adding keyboardist Billy Preston for remainder of the project, and not only for musical input in that the "no overdubs" approach all but required side musicians to record live with the band if additional instrumentation was desired beyond the quartet. Preston's presence also acted as a much-needed buffer between the four Beatles as far as the ongoing and increasingly vitriolic clashes. Third, the live concert/film was also scrapped in favor of making a feature-length film documentary. Nonetheless, on January 30, 1969, the Beatles with Preston in tow made a final, brief return to live performance with an unannounced afternoon concert on the roof of Apple's office building as part of the film. The show was shut down by the police due to noise complaints and causing traffic congestion much to the delight of the band. The next day of filming "Let It Be" and "The Long and Winding Road" quickly reverted to McCartney playing for the camera while Lennon and Harrison silently fumed in the background. It was the last day of work on the project, which was subsequently shelved.[4]

Coupled with the creative tensions, by 1969 Apple Corps was becoming a financial fiasco. Indeed, Lennon's pursuit of his solo music career, avant-garde projects, and political activism outside the Beatles was financially supported by the resources of Apple and revenue almost entirely generated

by the Beatles' musical product. This typified the inherent contradiction of Apple's approach and the need to convert Western communism in theory into a viable corporation in practice. Former Apple employee Richard DiLello recounted, "This was no longer an idealistic hippie dream, saving the world and giving people the chance to do whatever they wanted to under the auspices of the Beatles…. This was now, 'Okay, it's all about money and turning this into a real business….' Jetting around the world for peace—someone had to pay for that."[5]

Moreover, Lennon and McCartney were at odds over who should take over management of the Beatles' immense but insolvent financial operations. McCartney's choice was Lee and John Eastman, successful entertainment lawyers who were also his father-in-law and brother-in-law. Understandably apprehensive about the prospect of the Beatle's business affairs being run by McCartney's relatives, the other Beatles favored the Rolling Stones' manager Allen Klein, who became the Beatle's manager and Apple Corps CEO in May of 1969.[6] Not surprisingly, the vote was 3–1 in favor of Klein, although Lennon served as the primary force in hiring Klein and McCartney refused to sign any management agreements.[7]

Rather than end their legendary music career in bad-tempered disorder and dissatisfaction, the Beatles regrouped sporadically through February-August 1969 in order to record *Abbey Road* as an unofficial farewell album with George Martin taking the reins as producer.[8] Amid the ongoing controversy and criticism surrounding Lennon and Ono, and in a show of support for his beleaguered bandmate, McCartney put his escalating differences with Lennon aside to also record the Beatles' single "The Ballad of John and Yoko" in April of 1969. With Harrison on vacation and Starr working on the film *The Magic Christian*, the two played all the instruments and recorded the song in one day. Like "Give Peace a Chance," "John and Yoko" was a Dylan-influenced folk-rock song in which Lennon unambiguously chronicled the personal difficulties and alleged persecution he and Yoko experienced the preceding months with a fair amount of indignant self-aggrandizement beneath the ostensible self-effacing irony. Put differently, if "Give Peace a Chance" was Lennon acting as a booster for pacifist global change, "The Ballad of John and Yoko" cast Lennon and Ono as the martyrs of the counterculture movement.

*Abbey Road* ultimately returned to the production system the band implemented on earlier albums, specifically *Sgt. Pepper*, best evidenced on the second side's sixteen-minute medley of eight songs: "You Never Give Me Your Money"(McCartney, 4:02), "Sun King" (Lennon, 2:45), "Mean Mr. Mustard" (Lennon, 1:06), "Polythene Pam" (Lennon, 1:12), "She Came in Through the Bathroom Window" (McCartney, 1:59), "Golden Slumbers (McCartney, 1:31), "The Weight" (McCartney, 1:36), "The End" (McCartney, 2:05).[9] It was assembled from several older and/or unfinished song sketches and combined into a suite through band performances, overdubbing, and studio editing by Martin and McCartney. At one level, the medley was not so much an attempt to do a "concept song" with overarching narrative and/or thematic content but McCartney's effort to develop a group dynamic, namely encouraging a disinterested Lennon to become more creatively involved and providing Martin with more production duties after what amounted to his demotion during the *Get Back* sessions. However, while Lennon's medley contributions were third-person songs about bizarre characters (the messianic yet meaningless "Sun King," the misanthropic "Mean Mr. Mustard," the sexually mysterious "Polythene Pam") McCartney's songs alternated between first, second, and third-person perspectives as thinly-veiled discussions of the Beatles' strained relationships. "You Never Give Me Your Money" was none-too-subtly directed at Allen Klein, "She Came in Through the Bathroom Window" could be heard as an attack on Yoko Ono, and the penultimate track "The Weight" reflected McCartney's overall weariness with trying to hold the Beatles together as a band. The aptly tilted "The End" concluded the medley with individual solos by each band member (a short drum solo and three brief guitar solos) before ending with a piano-orchestra coda and a couplet that qualified the unconditional sentiments of "All You Need Is Love." The closing lines pointed out that the love someone consumes is (only) equitable to the love someone produces: a fitting epitaph for a band that was slowly and bitterly consuming itself over personal ambitions and private financial interests.

*Abbey Road* also featured the Beatles' final effort to negotiate mass music and theoretical music, Lennon's "I Want You (She's So Heavy)." Running 7: 44, the slow dirge alternated between jumpy 4/4 blues verses and leaden 6/8 hard rock choruses; the lyrics mostly consisted of repeating the title for the verses and the subtitle for the choruses. The 6/8 section also served as the

extended conclusion, becoming a repetitive, grinding waltz of distorted guitars topped with "white noise" effects. Starr overdubbed a wind machine while Lennon overdubbed whooshing Moog synthesizer noises sounded like someone randomly dialing a short wave radio through a overdriven guitar amplifier before the song suddenly ended in mid-bar by manually shutting of the tape machine.

## *Swan Song:* Let It Be

As noted last chapter, following completion of *Abbey Road* and after the live debut of the Plastic Ono Band, in September of 1969 Lennon privately informed Klein and the rest of the Beatles he was quitting the Beatles altogether. However, all parties agreed to postpone any announcement until Klein completed new contract and royalty negotiations between Apple and EMI and also avoid upstaging the recently released *Abbey Road*. In this context, "Cold Turkey" and *Live Peace* were Lennon's unofficial solo single and album debuts. Another issue arose in late 1969 with Lennon's planned third single by the Plastic Ono Band, "You Know My Name (Look Up the Number)" backed with "What's the New Mary Jane?" Originally recorded in summer of 1967 (ca. *Sgt. Pepper*) with Brian Jones guesting on saxophone, "You Know My Name" was a music hall/lounge pastiche or parody, depending on one's interpretation (cf. the Mothers of Invention's lounge send-up "America Drinks Up and Goes Home"). During the *Abbey Road* sessions, McCartney, Lennon, and Mal Evans returned to the song and augmented it with multiple voice overdubs and electronic effects although there were no plans to ever release it. "Mary Jane" was a Lennon song reminiscent of Syd Barrett-era Pink Floyd recorded by Lennon, Ono, Harrison, and Evans during *The White Album* sessions. With a title that contained an obvious drug reference, it alternates between unsteady 6/8 verses, a chorus with shifting time signatures over a pounding piano, and electronic noise punctuations which eventually subsume the song. However, as Apple was gearing up for the release of the single it was summarily cancelled. One could suggest Lennon's plan was to release a single that would intentionally bomb on the charts in that *neither* song had any commercial potential, an outcome which Apple could not, rather literally,

afford at that point. The other Beatles, namely McCartney, were also opposed to Lennon releasing existing Beatles' recordings under the Plastic Ono Band moniker. However, as relationships disintegrated between the Beatles in the final weeks of their official existence, "You Know My Name" was the extremely incongruent choice for the B-side of the Beatles' final U.K. single release, McCartney's ballad "Let It Be." Whether this was a parting shot at McCartney, who was the "odd man out" if not *persona non grata* as far as the band by this stage, can be left open to debate.

Any official statement of Lennon's departure and the Beatles' break-up was further delayed by the impending theatrical release of *Let It Be* as well as a requisite soundtrack album. In order to complete *Let It Be*, McCartney, Harrison, and Starr briefly reconvened in January of 1970 with George Martin producing to record a new version "I Me Mine" and finalize overdubs on "Let It Be" (one being McCartney overdubbing a new bass part and eliminating Lennon's bass playing on the song). *Let It Be*'s director Michael Lindsay-Hogg wanted to include footage of Lennon and Ono waltzing to "I Me Mine" from the original *Get Back* project, but the recorded version was considered unusable, necessitating a new version that effectively signified the dissolution of the Beatles. A song Harrison wrote about dealing with the egotism that comes with superstardom, it can also be heard as a commentary on the Beatles' disintegration from a band into four ego-driven artists. In that Lennon already quit the band and did not attend the sessions, the version of "I Me Mine" the three remaining Beatles recorded consisted of a verse, chorus, and second verse with a distinct internal contrast. The verses were a 6/8 blues dirge with a funeral organ line and Harrison's gentle, morose vocals while the chorus abruptly shifted to a faster 4/4 fifties-style rock rave-up with pounding piano and McCartney's half-sung/half-shouted vocals repeating the song's title. David Browne suggested, "'I Me Mine' didn't merely feel like two songs welded together. It sounded like the mesh of two different people and personalities—one resigned to a finale, another desperate to avoid it."[10] Here Browne is partially correct. While Harrison and the verses indeed sound like "someone resigned to a finale," McCartney and the chorus does not sound like someone "desperate to avoid it" but someone emphatically announcing the finale and asserting his individual independence.

In a move to generate additional capital, in February of 1970 Apple released *Hey Jude*, a collection of non-album singles and B-sides that became the first of many Beatles' "greatest hits" compilations and officially ended the unofficial Beatles' policy of not re-releasing singles as album tracks. In order to maintain the appearance they were still a functioning band, "Two of Us" and "Let It Be" were culled from the forthcoming *Let It Be* and shown on *The Ed Sullivan Show* as promotional films (February 15, 1970).[11] Through the recommendation of Lennon, Klein hired Phil Spector to repair the *Get Back* recording sessions as best as possible for release as the accompanying *Let It Be* soundtrack album. George Martin's production role was not credited on the album: in effect, Martin was fired as the Beatles' producer.[12]

While Spector's over-production on specific tracks has been oft-criticized, much of *Let It Be* retained the "back to basics" concept. "I've Got a Feeling," "One After 909," and "Dig a Pony" were taken from the rooftop concert while "Two of Us," "Get Back," and "For You Blue" were live-in-studio recordings (produced by Martin and remixed by Spector). Only four of the twelve tracks eventually underwent the Spector "wall of sound" treatment.[13] "I Me Mine" was only a minute and a half in its final recorded version, and Spector lengthened the song an additional minute by repeating the chorus and final verse after the original version ended. He also added brass and string overdubs to the mix to not only "enhance" the song but distract the listener from the fact that the second chorus and third verse were the same take as the first chorus and second verse. Using a demo version of Lennon's "Across the Universe" recorded in early 1968, Spector all but eliminated the band by saturating the mix with orchestra and choir.[14] Spector also remixed the Martin-produced single version of "Let It Be," elevating the volume of the blaring horns at the expense of the backing vocals in the chorus.

The main controversy erupted over Spector's production on "The Long and Winding Road," an issue that amounted to the final nail in the Beatles' coffin. Written by McCartney and originally recorded as a sparse rock ballad, McCartney played piano and sang the lead vocal with Starr on drums, Harrison on guitar, and Lennon on bass. Whether to mask the unenthusiastic contributions of Harrison and Lennon (whose bass playing was noticeably

out of tune at several points, either by intent or indifference), Spector buried the band in a mix dominated by overdubbed strings, horns, a harp, and choir. As a result, "The Long and Winding Road" veered into MOR schmaltz, a volatile issue since McCartney was about to launch his own solo career and battling public perceptions he was the "pop" commercial side of the Beatles while Lennon embodied the "rock" counterculture side. In a sharply worded letter to Klein that all but accused the parties involved of deliberate musical sabotage, McCartney demanded Spector remix the song along the lines of the original recording and emphatically added, "In the future no one will be allowed to add or subtract to a recording of one of my songs…. Don't ever do it again."[15] Spector's mix was left intact. McCartney hired Lee and John Eastman as his personal business managers and, in a surprise press release issued a week before the release of his solo debut album *McCartney*, he effectively announced *he* was leaving the Beatles.[16] When *Let It Be* was released a month later, it was a posthumous document that amounted to a repaired "outtakes" album and cobbled-up documentary film released to fulfill contractual obligations and generate revenue. While defending Spector's controversial production decisions on *Let It Be* in a 1971 *Rolling Stone* interview, Lennon dismissed the Beatles' performances as "the shittiest load of badly recorded shit with a lousy feeling."

While Altamont and Charles Manson are often designated as the symbolic end of the Sixties and the counterculture dream of worldwide peace and love, *Let It Be* serves a similar function. *Sgt. Pepper* encapsulated the drug-tinged utopian aspirations of the late 1960s counterculture and *Let It Be* signified the Beatles—both as a band and the dream they ostensibly stood for—contaminated by individualism, self-interest, a lost sense of community, and rock as "oppositional culture" inevitably being under the sway of a corporate-capitalist system it allegedly opposed. While "All You Need Is Love" effectively summarized the prevailing and psychedelic/youth culture world-view of 1967, *Let It Be*'s messages amid the twilight of the counterculture era were unconditional retreat to the past ("Get Back") and a resignation that there is no solution save accepting the end and looking for metaphysical meaning behind it all ("Let It Be"). Fittingly, the album cover of *Let It Be* was the album title over four *individual* photos of the band members with distinct borders separating them. Excepting *The White Album*, *Let It Be* was the first Beatles album cover that did not feature a *group* visual

representation of the band (i.e., a photo or artistic rendering of the band "together" on the front cover). However, the band name was the only thing on the otherwise blank cover of *The White Album*. On *Let It Be* "the Beatles" was conspicuously absent and, for all intent and purposes, the album title effectively meant "rest in peace." Indeed, if *Sgt. Pepper's* cover represented the death of the mop-top Beatles and the birth of the counterculture Beatles, *Let It Be*'s cover represented the death of the Beatles as a collective entity and the birth of four individual performers.

In summary, the Beatles as a musical-political project can be roughly categorized into three stages musically and two stages as far as "public image."

| | |
|---|---|
| **Pop Beatles (Beatlemania, 1963–5)** | |
| Early recordings up to *Help!* | Mop-top image |
| **Psychedelic Beatles (Evolution, 1965–7)** | ↓ |
| *Rubber Soul* | |
| *Revolver* | |
| *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* | Counterculture image |
| *Magical Mystery Tour* | |
| **Postmodern Beatles (Apple-era, 1968–70)** | ↓ |
| *The White Album* | |
| *Abbey Road* | |
| *Let It Be* | |

The Beatles' break-up was the end result of increasing factionalism of the band around musical, financial, political, and personal issues rendered the band incapable of functioning as a group. The collapse of the Beatles also produced a rupture in rock ideology as it developed throughout the counterculture era, the mythic status of rock as oppositional culture that was inherently opposed to the system. In order to inhibit the contradictions, the "Lennon vs. McCartney" dialectic—rightly or wrongly—was constructed to maintain the binary logic of rock ideology signified by the Beatles as "myth."

| Lennon | McCartney |
| --- | --- |
| Rock artist | Pop songsmith |
| Authentic | Inauthentic |
| Counterculture | Mainstream culture |
| Anti-Establishment | Establishment |
| Avant-garde | Commercial |
| Political | Apolitical |
| Communism | Capitalism |
| Proletariat (working class) | Bourgeois (middle-and-upper class) |

In the aftermath of John Lennon's murder in 1980, Greil Marcus wrote a eulogy for Lennon that perpetuated the Beatles' mythos as much as paying tribute to Lennon (*Rolling Stone*, January 22, 1981):

> The Beatles and their fans played out an image of utopia … one could join a group and by doing so not lose one's identity as an individual but find it: find one's own voice…. While the Beatles were the Beatles, this image informed love affairs and politics. It shaped one's sense of possibility and loss, and the worth of things. At the heart of this cheeky, joyful, shiny utopia was romanticism…. But that utopia was grounded —by John Lennon—in wit, worry, contingency, doubt, and struggle…. If the Beatles were a common adventure, John Lennon was its point man and its center…. And it was John Lennon who, once the Beatles ended, sustained the struggle over the image of utopia.[17]

McCartney may have been the Beatle who propelled the group into avant-garde territory, but only to the extent theoretical music could serve the purposes of advancing mass music into a more artistically sophisticated terrain to the point theoretical music became the stuff of pastiche. Conversely, Lennon was the Beatle who moved most intently into the avant-garde and, along with it, global political activism. The issue was Lennon effectively wanted it both ways and pursued his aesthetic-political radicalism on the Beatles' dime as the bourgeois revolutionary *artiste* attempting to lecture and lead the masses into an "enlightened" political consciousness. Ultimately, the greater enduring "myth" of the Beatles as icons of the 1960s counterculture is now sustained through substituting nostalgia for history

and ostensibly oppositional cultural consumption, as Lester Bangs pointedly argued (*Creem*, June 1975):

> If the Beatles *stood* for anything besides the rock 'n' roll band as a communal unit suggesting the possibility of mass youth power, which proved to be a totally fatuous concept in short order, I'd like to know what I have missed by not missing the Beatles. They certainly didn't stand for peace or love or true liberation or brotherhood of humankind, any more than John Denver stands for the preservation of our natural resources. On the other hand, like Davy Crockett hats, zoot suits, marathon dances, and bootleg alcohol, they well may have stood for an era, so well as to stand out from that era, totally exhumed from it…. They can be dusted off at appropriate intervals, depending on the needs of Capitol's ledgers and our own inability to cope with the present.[18]

# Part Two

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# No Commercial Potential

*Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention*

# 6

## Zappa in Context

### Pal Recording Studios and *The Steve Allen Show* (1963)

> By the time I graduated from high school in'58, I still hadn't written any rock and roll songs, although I had a little rock and roll band my senior year. I didn't write any rock and roll stuff until I was in my 20s. All the music writing I was doing was either chamber music or orchestral.[1]
>
> —Frank Zappa

### *Zappa and Mass Music: "Grunion Run" (1963) and "Memories of El Monte" (1963)*

In 1961, aspiring musician/composer Frank Zappa began working at Pal Recording Studio (PRS) in Rancho Cucamonga, California.[2] Owned and operated by self-taught multi-instrumentalist Paul Buff, PRS was very much a DIY independent studio: Buff built a five-track recording board out of a dresser and the necessary electronic parts. He also invested in a record lathe that enabled him to make his own acetates and send record companies actual test pressings (under a variety of band names) rather than reel-to-reel demo tapes. While an all-purpose studio, after the Surfaris recorded "Wipeout" at PRS in late 1962 and it became a Top Ten hit in America and Britain the next year, PRS became synonymous with surf music.

Zappa's first official rock song release was recorded at PRS as "the Masters." The B-side to a Buff-performed/produced cover of "Sixteen

Tons," "Breaktime" (1962) was a surf/R&B instrumental Zappa co-wrote and played brittle guitar solos in alternation with Buff's boogie-woogie piano riffing while Ronnie Williams provided the drums and bass guitar. (Williams was later "honored" with his brother Kenny in the Mothers of Invention's song "Let's Make the Water Turn Black," discussed in Chapter 9.) In 1963, Buff wrote, performed, and produced the instrumental "Tijuana Surf." Buff asked Zappa to handle the B-side. Zappa wrote and produced "Grunion Run," and the song's satirical title did not come from surfer slang or a celebrated locale (i.e., "Wipeout," "Pipeline," "Point Panic") but an annual practice of late-night hand-fishing grunions in Southern California. An instrumental using a 12-bar blues structure, a R&B horn section, and a shuffle rhythm (the song can be counted in either slow 4/4 or fast 6/8), "Grunion Run" sounded like a skewed but equally raunchy version of "burlesque music" rather than surf music. In effect, "Grunion Run" was a "pick-up song" about trolling for late-night sex rather than fun in the sun.[3] The song also served as a showcase for Zappa's fuzz guitar soloing and concluded with an overdubbed clean guitar solo on top of the distorted guitar solo. As opposed to twin guitar leads, when two guitars play the same or different solos but retain a melodic or harmonic unity, the guitars on "Grunion Run" have little in common tonally and results in an abrupt fade-out soon after the "duel" as opposed to "dual" guitar soloing begins.

Credited to the Hollywood Persuaders, Art Laboe's Original Sound record label bought the single; "Tijuana Surf" subsequently became a regional hit in the southwestern U.S. and spent several weeks atop the Mexican singles charts, even preventing the Beatles' "I Want to Hold Your Hand" from becoming a No. 1 hit in Mexico. Additionally, Zappa had a certain degree of success with "Memories of El Monte" (1963, also released on Original Sound), a doo-wop song that became a minor hit in the California market. Zappa produced and co-wrote the song with Ray Collins and it was credited to the Penguins, best-known for recording the original version of "Earth Angel" in 1954. However, the only Penguin on "El Monte" was former lead vocalist Cleveland Duncan and his presence is specifically noted in the course of the song. Indeed, "El Monte" is a doo-wop song about doo-wop music with the title alluding to the large-scale dances/concerts promoted by Laboe at El Monte Legion Stadium. Freely "referencing" the chord progressions of "Earth Angel," Duncan begins "El Monte" by pining for a

lost love that is soon revealed not to be just a woman but a bygone era. The otherwise intentionally trite lyrics and predictable melody of the verses incorporate the names of performers, hit song titles, and melodic quotes ranging from the Five Satins' "In the Still of the Night," the Shields' "You Cheated," the Heartbeats' "A Thousand Miles Away," and the Medallions' "The Letter" and "Buick 59." Eventually, Duncan announces himself by name as the vocalist and proceeds to sing the opening lines of "Earth Angel" and after the final verse closes "El Monte" with a reprise of "Earth Angel."

"Memories of El Monte" and "Grunion Run" served as early indications of Zappa's approach to and, as important, his attitude towards popular music. This is not to question the "sincerity" of Zappa's popular music influences on his work, but the critical debate around Zappa's work frequently centers on the question of parody versus pastiche, and the extent the former is outweighed by the latter as far as Zappa's postmodernism. At this stage, what is being proposed is that Zappa's work was manifestly parodic *and* postmodern. In the scope of Fredric Jameson's critique of postmodernism, Zappa's work was postmodern in its self-consciously artificial, eclectic, ironic, and (self-)referential aspects. Nonetheless, it retained the function of parody—often vicious, to boot—as opposed to succumbing to the neutrality of "blank parody." Indeed, Zappa's work was not content with comedy or parody but an overt *mockery* of the various genres and, as important, the expectations and taste of the popular music consumer: an approach that became more pronounced in Zappa's work with the Mothers of Invention.

As important, Zappa's early years at PRS shaped a cynicism the record business. Barry Miles suggested that "[Zappa] was enormously influenced by … independent record milieu, the scams and the deals, the quick cash-in on chart hits, the 'ice-cream' changes made to someone else's songs…. He found it impossible to believe that someone was playing rock and roll for any reason other than to make money."[4] Not unrelated, Kelly Fisher Lowe argued that "Zappa's very definition of *earning a living* is what drove him towards popular music."[5] This view that rock music was first and foremost a consumer product separated Zappa from his contemporaries in rejecting the idea rock was an artistic vehicle for fostering political change, Zappa's social commentary lyrics notwithstanding. As Zappa put it in the early

1990s, “If you think of a Rolling Stones song as a modern composition you could bemoan the fact that it winds up being used in a commercial. But I believe at the time most of that material was manufactured, the goal was to make money and not create an anthem for a generation.”[6]

### *Zappa and Theoretical Music:* Improvised Piece for Two Bicycles, Prerecorded Tape and the Musicians in the Back *(1963;* The Steve Allen Show*)*

During the early 1960s Frank Zappa was *not* an aspiring rock musician, yet alone an emerging rock star like the Beach Boys, the Beatles, or the Rolling Stones. Rather, he was working in a popular music “hit factory” to generate income while actively pursuing a career in the field of avant-garde/experimental music. Zappa’s first modern classical concert took place at Mount St. Mary’s College in 1963, hiring the Paloma Valley Symphony Orchestra for $300 to perform a recital of his works to an audience that Zappa estimated at less than 100 people. It was a serviceable if not particularly outstanding program of avant-garde/experimental music along the lines of Zappa’s primary influence Edgard Varèse with elements of John Cage and free jazz thrown in as well.

Zappa’s initial exposure to a national audience also occurred in 1963—three years before the Mothers of Invention’s debut album—as a guest on *The Steve Allen Show* giving a demonstration of avant-garde/experimental music.[7] Barry Miles recounted

> [Zappa] had been angling to get on the show for some time as a serious musician and also with his jazz recordings, but they weren’t interested until he came up with a gimmick: he would play a bicycle, a musical form he called ‘Cyclophony.’ Dressed soberly in a dark suit, Frank seemed a little in awe of Allen, then at the height of his fame, and a little too anxious to ingratiate himself with Allen…. The fully developed Zappa persona had yet to arrive.[8]

Following an interview with Allen and a segment in which Zappa did a "how-to" explanation on playing a bicycle as a musical instrument by using drumsticks on the frame, drawing a bow across the spokes, ringing the bell, etc.—all the while gamely enduring Allen's endless sarcasm—there was a performance of what Zappa titled *Improvised Concerto for Two Bicycles, Prerecorded Tape, and the Musicians in the Back.* It consisted of Zappa and Allen playing upended bicycles like percussion instruments, a prerecorded tape of electronic sounds to be operated at the discretion of the studio soundman, and Allen's house band providing a backdrop of atonal free playing that frequently drowned out the featured bicycles altogether.

As Chris Crocker described the performance, "Dressed in a suit and tie, the seemingly straight-laced guest tickled Allen's love of the absurd … the dissonant free-fire zone they produced became mainstream America's first moment of Zappified weirdness, with the young composer turning a national TV variety show into a festival of noise."[9] However, Zappa's performance—more correctly, Zappa and Allen's performance—of *Two Bicycles* proves more complicated than Crocker's rhapsodic assessment of Allen and Zappa's mutual "love of the absurd" generating a "festival of noise." Best-known as a TV comedian and talk-show host, Allen was also a pianist and songwriter whose taste unabashedly tended towards mainstream jazz, show tunes, and popular standards: in short, middlebrow culture. A 1957 show featuring Allen on piano and Ginger Rogers on vocals mocked highbrow culture in the form of various "girl singers" (Allen's words) ranging from the pompous opera diva to what Allen termed the self-indulgent "ultra-progressive jazz type." Allen expressed even greater distain for lowbrow culture, namely rock and roll, exemplified by an infamous July 1956 appearance by Elvis Presley. With Presley uncomfortably clad in a tuxedo (i.e., a signifier of the highbrow), before his first song "I Want You, I Need You, I Love You" Allen presented him with a petition signed by 18,000 Elvis fans in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in support of him amid a controversial hip-gyrating appearance on *The Milton Berle Show* the previous month. While the petition was genuine, it looked like a giant roll of toilet paper. Following "I Want You" Allen wheeled a platform onstage carrying a Bassett Hound adorned in a top hat and bow tie. Presley then performed "Hound Dog" as a serenade to the dog. Allen later claimed the segment was designed to present Presley in a more light-hearted way

apropos to his comedy show after Presley's *Milton Berle Show* appearance. However, the segment came off as expressly designed to humiliate Presley and insult his fans by designating them as, rather literally, "mongrels" (Presley later described his *Steve Allen Show* appearance as "ridiculous" and "embarrassing"). In other examples, a 1957 telecast featured Allen reciting the lyrics of Gene Vincent's "Be Bop a Lula" with a solemnity reeking of sarcasm against a backdrop of lilting piano to uproarious studio audience laughter. It left little doubt the butt of the joke was rock lyrics as so much nonsense. Eschewing any subtlety, in 1958 Beverly Kenney appeared on Allen's show to perform her cocktail jazz/novelty song "I Hate Rock and Roll."

In this context, Zappa's role on *The Steve Allen Show* was not as an object of rock music mockery but avant-garde/experimental music mockery. During *Two Bicycles* Allen variously mugged at the camera, checked his watch and then shrugged, or performed with an exaggerated mock-enthusiasm. Allen also inadvertently interrupted the performance when Zappa prompted the stagehand holding the microphone for the bicycles to add some impromptu spoken-word and he began reciting "Mary Had a Little Lamb." Not to be up-staged after his faux pas, a few moments later Allen interjected some of his own joke "poetry." In the end, the performance of *Two Bicycles* did not represent avant-garde/experimental music through a challenging yet humorous "organization of sound" like John Cage's 1960 appearance on the CBS panel game-show *I've Got a Secret* where he performed *Water Walk* (1959): a piece including a grand piano, two cymbals, prerecorded sounds, five radios, a bathtub, an electric blender, a seltzer bottle, a goose call, and a rubber duck as instrumentation.[10] Instead, Zappa was used by Allen to represent avant-garde/experimental music as a hopeless and amateurish stunt produced by stupid gimmickry. The discerning listener with any modicum of "good taste" could and should dismiss the "festival of noise" and what it represented as a sham to be *laughed at*.

While Steve Allen was a well-known TV personality who represented a kind of liberal "hipness" in American popular culture in the early 1960s, ultimately Allen was a staunch proponent of middle-brow "music" and equally aghast at the "noise" of avant-garde/experimental music as well as

rock and roll. Conversely, Zappa began to harness “lowbrow” popular music and “highbrow” avant-garde/experimental music with the Mothers of Invention and, as important, a “fully developed Zappa persona” came to the fore.[11] Unlike the short-haired and clean-shaven “avant-gardist” Zappa who was subdued and eager to please on *The Steve Allen Show*, the “rock star” Zappa with long hair, moustache, and soul patch was unapologetically condescending and crass.

# 7

## Motherly Summer of Love

*Freak Out!* (1966)

> I composed a composite, gap-filling product that fills most of the gaps between so-called serious music and so-called popular music.[1]
>
> —Frank Zappa

### *Enter the Mothers of Invention*

As discussed last chapter, in the early 1960s Frank Zappa's work in popular music and avant-garde/experimental music were mutually exclusive, although one can hear the direction Zappa was headed on his soundtrack music for the low-budget Western *Run Home, Slow* (the music was composed ca. 1963 but the film eventually released in 1965). The title theme sounded like generic Western production music filtered through Edgard Varèse or Igor Stravinsky. Juxtaposing twangy guitar lines, churning stings, clattering percussion, and dissonant horns, it could have easily fit in on subsequent Zappa solo records like *Lumpy Gravy* or even *Hot Rats*. Moreover, the "love theme" for a scene in *Run Home, Slow* when a nymphomaniac seduces her hunchback cousin was used as the basis for the love song parody "The Duke of Prunes" (*Absolutely Free*); Ray Collins added absurd, ad-libbed lyrics in, for a lack of a better description, a "singing waiter" vocal style. More specifically, "The Duke of Prunes" was the first of a medley of three songs. The second song "Amnesia Vivace" liberally quoted from Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and *The Firebird* as well as Gene Chandler's doo-wop standard "Duke of Earl" while the third

song, “The Duke Regains His Chops” was a reprise of “The Duke of Prunes” infused with sarcastic inner-commentary on the song itself, such as Zappa pointing out how the song’s climax was inspired by the Supremes. Here “The Duke of Prunes” medley serves as an indicative example of Zappa’s “Project/Object” philosophy where pre-existing “raw material” across his career—as well as references to and quotations of work by other performers—could be freely recycled into various new “products” (discussed further in Chapter 10).

Ca. 1964–5, Ray Collins contacted Zappa about filling a vacant guitar position in a bar band called the Soul Giants, which included Collins (lead vocals), Roy Estrada (bass), and Jimmy Carl Black (drums).[2] Zappa renamed the band the Mothers—a slang term for adroit musicians who could play like “mother fuckers”—and became the band’s musical director and primary composer; Elliot Ingber was added as a second guitarist but fired by Zappa shortly after the release of the debut album *Freak Out!*[3] Put less charitably, Zappa became the Mothers’ musical *dictator* given his career reputation for technically demanding music and perfectionist approach to studio performance and production (as discussed next chapter, live performances could and would be much more chaotic affairs).

Following the Watts Riots in August of 1965, Zappa wrote a mid-tempo, blues-rock song about the incident, “Trouble Every Day.” A “minimalist” song compared to Zappa’s later compositions, “Trouble Every Day” had a steady backbeat groove and a continually repeated guitar riff where the main tonal variation was simply moving the riff up a fifth in the pre-chorus. Lyrically, the song offered a blanket criticism of the riots ranging from sensationalistic media coverage, overzealous police, opportunistic looters, and bigots regardless of race. Put differently, “Trouble Every Day” heaped equal criticism on those in power and those fighting the power without offering any substantial criticism of the power structure itself—a lyrical strategy that became Zappa’s *modus operandi*. Under the impression they were a political but musically straightforward rock band, on the basis of “Trouble Every Day” producer Tom Wilson signed the Mothers to a five album deal with MGM/Verve on condition they change the official name to the Mothers of Invention.[4]

## *Freak Scene:* Freak Out!

The Mothers were political but anything but conventional and their debut *Freak Out!* was one rock's first double-album releases and also one of the most expensive to produce at the time. Despite being recorded over the course of four days, a then-unprecedented $25,000–$30,000 was spent on the album owing to session musicians, equipment rentals, and post-production studio composition.[5] Zappa considered *Freak Out!* a concept album, a musical documentary satirizing American culture and society where the parts (the songs) were best understood in their relationship to the whole (the album): be they pop parody, rock commentary, or avant-garde cacophony. To emphasize his point, Zappa wrote copious liner notes for the album including a song-by song breakdown of *Freak Out!* Despite the teeming sarcasm, they firmly instructed the listener as far as properly receiving the songs and discerning their "meaning."

*Freak Out!* represented Zappa's initial efforts to merge popular music genres like rock, R&B, and doo-wop; the ideas of avant-garde/experimental composers like Cage, Stravinsky, and especially Varèse; and social commentary lyrics attacking numerous targets that could vary from song to song and even within songs. However, a problem of *Freak Out!* is an overall lack of a cohesive sound or musical focus, especially given Zappa soon developed a singular and often difficult musical style—in *both* senses of the word—through an unbridled eclecticism and complexity regardless of what one might think of the output. The first and second sides of *Freak Out!* were the rock album where the third and fourth sides were largely an avant-garde/experimental music album. In other words, the listener wanting the more accessible Zappa songs could concentrate on the first album and the listener wanting the more esoteric Zappa fare could focus on the second album.[6]

Opening with "Hungry Freaks, Daddy," the first album also included "Who Are the Brain Police?," "Motherly Love" and concluded with "You're Probably Wondering Why I'm Here." All four songs utilized kazoos as "horns" in lieu of the saxophones that soon after became integral to the

Mothers' sound. "Hungry Freaks, Daddy" attacked the education system and consumer society through the character of "Mr. America"—a symbol of the white, middle-class, Middle American "square" male. However, Zappa's liner notes haughtily placed the onus on the listener to practice some self-determination as far as confronting the problem: "Drop out of school before your mind rots from exposure to our mediocre education system. Forget about Senior Prom and go to the library and educate yourself, if you got any guts." One of many Zappa's songs commenting on popular music in some capacity, "Motherly Love" mocked groupies and teenyboppers as much as the "cult of personality" built around rock stardom. "You're Probably Wondering Why I'm Here," a song written from the perspective of a fed-up rock band telling the audience what they actually think of performing for them, assailed the popular music consumer only interested in music as a background for leisure time activities like dancing and getting drunk.[7] "You're Probably Wondering" also specifically targeted the younger music consumer in the second verse where Zappa imitates a teenage dullard explaining the damage to their parent's car after a night out on the town while the third verse is clearly directed at a vacuous woman who enjoys the counterculture scene so she can get dolled up and meet boys. As will be discussed throughout the analysis of the Mothers, this aspect of Zappa's social criticism could and would succumb to coarse sexism and becoming highly condescending and demeaning to young, popular music consumers—including his own fans.

In this respect, a sizable amount of the first half of *Freak Out!* was devoted to satirical but highly conventional sounding Fifties rock and roll, doo-wop, and pop songs like "Go Cry on Somebody Else's Shoulder," "How Could I Be Such a Fool," "Wowie Zowie," "You Didn't Try to Call Me," and "Any Way the Wind Blows." The most effective of the lot, the piano and xylophone-propelled "Wowie Zowie" was an intentionally insipid pop song that Zappa's liner notes stated was "carefully designed to suck the 12 year old listener into our camp." A first person account of a man so hopelessly infatuated he forgives a woman's lax personal hygiene and the fact that her father is a police officer, as much as Zappa satirizes the clichés of the love song the target is ultimately the tween/teen record consumer with underdeveloped musical taste who might enjoy the execrable "Zowie Wowie" for any other reason than its satirical intent.

While this strategy of attacking the popular music consumer rather than the culture industry became a recurring issue in Zappa's critique of mass culture, as a satirical critique of pop music "Wowie Zowie" suggests a similar distain for its *infantilism* as expressed by Theodor W. Adorno:

> The music, as well as the lyrics, tend to affect such a children's language…. Unabating repetition of some particular musical formula comparable to the attitude of a child uttering the same demand … the limitation of many melodies to very few tones, comparable to the way in which a small child speaks before [they have] the full alphabet under [their] disposal; purposely wrong harmonization resembling the way in which small children express themselves in incorrect grammar; also certain over-sweet sound colors, functioning like musical cookies and candies.[8]

In "Wowie Zowie" this infantilism is expressed in the rudimentary musical setting, the intentionally dumb lyrics and nonsense catchphrase title, the cloying sing-along melody, and the musical sugarcoating of tinkling tuned percussion and piano. Moreover, as a commentary on the culture industry aspects of popular music, "Wowie Zowie" concluded by repeatedly singing the title to the melody of the Four Season's "Sherry" (1962), satirically ending "Wowie Zowie" as a song the listener has literally heard before with different lyrics and a generic melody that can be show-horned into any musical setting.

Zappa recalled that the relatively innocuous "Any Way the Wind Blows" was the first song recorded for *Freak Out!* "Who Are the Brain Police?" was the second and when they began Zappa recounted that "I could see through the window [Wilson] was scrambling towards the phone to call his boss."[9] Arguably the song on *Freak Out!* best encapsulating Zappa's initial efforts to assemble popular and avant-garde/experimental music, "Brain Police" began with an introduction of thudding noises, fuzz bass, clanking percussion, and distorted moans. In the verses, the vocals fit uncomfortably with the music which lurches in 3/4 over twelve bars: Gadd2 (three bars)—Aadd2 (three bars)—Gadd2 (three bars)—Fadd2 (three bars).[10] Here Zappa violates one of the unofficial rules of rock and what might be called "the rule of four," namely 4/4 time signature and chord changes in multiples of

four (i.e., four, eight, twelve, sixteen bars). “Brain Police” is constructed around “a rule of *three*”—3/4 and three-bar chord changes over twelve bars —that is unaccustomed and uncomfortable changes and timing for normative rock listening. The title serves as the chorus sung in a mock doo-wop style saturated with effects, the bridge is a noise section of crashing drums and guitars, and the song ends with a highly distorted free kazoo solo.

While the song’s title is also used as the chorus to pose a question, it is not answered by the lyrics, which instead describe a surreal, inhuman, presumably authoritarian world of plastic and metal products (including people). However, in a 1988 interview in which Zappa was asked who the brain police actually were, he answered that “a lot of people police their own brains. They’re like citizen soldiers…. You’ve got plenty of people who willingly subject themselves to this self-mutilation.”[11] Indeed, Zappa’s lyrics almost inevitably blamed mass society’s problems on the unwillingness of the individual to practice “self-determination” rather than the determining social formations that instill conformity and obedience (e.g., compliant citizens instead of the State, religious zealots instead of the Church, popular music consumers instead of the Culture Industry).

With the exception of “Trouble Every Day,” the opening song on side three, the second album consists of avant-garde/experimental music excursions with a great deal of improvisation. The other song on the third side, “Help I’m a Rock (Suite in Three Movements)” began with “OK to Tap Dance,” a repeated 3/4 riff with the title chanted amid moans, groans, and gibberish vocals with occasionally decipherable lyrics directed at the police. The second movement, “In Memorandum, Edgar *[sic]* Varèse,” was a brief free piece consisting of rumbling percussion and vocals comically simulating sex—a man sounding like a grunting monkey while the woman seductively and repeatedly gasped. The third movement “It Can’t Happen Here” was a lyrical assault on Establishment denial that a discontent youth culture was emerging in America; it was done as an a cappella doo-wop/barbershop parody of conflicting, effects-treated voices save for a brief jazz interlude of meandering piano and drums.[12]

“The Return of the Son of Monster Magnet (Unfinished Ballet in Two Tableaux)” occupied the entire fourth side of the album (12:17) and divided into two parts: “Ritual Dance of the Child Killer” and “Nullis Pretii (No Commercial Potential).” As Zappa described it in the liner notes, the song “is what freaks sound like when you turn them loose in a recording studio at one o’clock in the morning on $500 of rented percussion instrument. A bright snappy number. Hotcha!” The first part title is parodic reference to Stravinsky’s “Ritual” sections from *The Rite of Spring* and predominately drumming alternating between a mid-tempo backbeat and much faster backbeat with the musical track an array of electronic sounds, a piano veering from lounge clichés to atonal bursts, and a chorus of vocals provided by numerous guests from the Los Angeles “freak scene” ranged from doo-wop crooning to non-verbal vocal sounds resembling birds and monkeys.[13] For the second part of “Monster Magnet,” the subtitle line “no commercial potential” was taken from a Dot Records’ rejection letter after Zappa’s former band the Soots submitted a demo. It would be an appellation that Zappa self-consciously used to brand his subsequent avant-rock output. This second section is a *musique concrète* coda made of made up of the instruments and multiple voices heavily modified by tape speed effects, increasingly sped-up until it becomes an onslaught of cartoonish gibberish.[14] Moreover, sections of “In Memorandum, Edgar Varèse” and “It Can’t Happen Here” can also be heard edited into “Monster Magnet” (or vice versa).

At one level, the sound of “Monster Magnet” could be described as “primitive” or “tribal” and a satirical riposte to conservative attacks on rock and roll as “jungle music” that promoted licentious behavior, namely sexual promiscuity and drug use. Zappa ups the ante by, in effect, providing an album side of rock and roll as overt “jungle music.” Jacques Attali wrote that “the hypotheses of noise as murder and music as sacrifice are not easy to accept. They imply that music *functions* like noise; that listening to noise is a little like being killed; that listening to music is to attend a ritual murder.”[15] The provocatively titled “Ritual Dance of the Child Killer” section denotes infanticide, and popular music as the domain of what Adorno viewed as infantilism in its rhythmic repetition, melodic limitation, and harmonic saccharinity.[16] Unlike the straightforward pop parody of “Wowie Zowie,” “Monster Magnet” mocks popular music by converting

rhythm into varying yet incessant backbeat monotony, harmony supplied by seemingly random noises, and the melody of a mass cacophony of voices making animal sounds until the song ends with a disintegration into comical noise with "no commercial potential." In short, on "Monster Magnet" the effort is made to kill popular music with the noise of avant-garde/experimental music supplied by a collective of freaks.

### *Introducing Suzy Creamcheese*

*Freak Out!* also introduced the character Suzy Creamcheese ("creamcheese" being a slang term for an attractive woman), who reappeared on subsequent Mothers recordings during the late 1960s. In the final moments of "It Can't Happen Here" Zappa addresses a woman named "Suzy" and then makes a lewd comment to which Suzy responds with an indignant rejection of his advance. However, what initially appears to be a comment on male sexism is reconfigured when carried over to "Monster Magnet." Side four opens with a continuation of the initial exchange on "It Can't Happen Here" that closes side three. The listener learns Zappa is the voice of Suzy Creamcheese's conscience or the *male* voice of inner reason sardonically interrogating the *female* Suzy about her behavior while she responds with monosyllabic answers, seemingly unable to fathom the questions. This relates to the album's back cover which features an open letter from Suzy, a high school student in Salt Lake City, in which she emphatically pointed out "None of the kids at my school like these Mothers … specially [*sic*] since my teacher told us what the words to their songs meant." In this context, if "Monster Magnet" represents the murder of popular music by noise, what is also being killed is the naivety of the pop music consumer represented by Suzy Creamcheese as a symbol of not only infantile but "feminine" mass culture.

Andreas Huyssen argued that "the political, psychological, and aesthetic discourse around the turn of the century consistently and obsessively genders mass culture and the masses as feminine."[17] This view was also manifest in rock culture and its ideology as developed in the 1960s around equating virile masculinity and social rebellion (i.e., Mick Jagger, Jim

Morrison) while simultaneously scapegoating of the young, female "teenybopper" music consumer as antithetical to the "authentic" male rock fan. As Norma Coates suggested, "It was not enough to designate women as low Others and to ignore their contributions to rock culture. They had to be actively distained and kept in their place…. Women and teenage girls came to be deemed the "outsiders" of rock culture."[18]

In this respect, Suzy Creamcheese becomes Zappa's all-purpose representation of cultural conformity—in this case, the ignorant, prim teenybopper deeply offended by the Mothers' "nastiness"—and a subtext of *Freak Out!* that would become a more overt theme on subsequent albums. As noted, the final verse of "You're Probably Wondering Why I'm Here" specifically attacks women as shallow, trendy scene-makers while "Motherly Love" was a fairly straightforward rock song extolling the Mothers' sexual prowess with the groupies backstage. As much as any a satire of "cock rock" mentality, "Motherly Love" ridiculed the "teenybopper" fantasy of a romantic rendezvous with a cute pop star that the less savory Mothers could actualize with much more finesse. To this extent, Zappa's self-assumed audience became one that has the intellectual savvy and cultural literacy to grasp the avant-garde aesthetics, musical references, and social satire; in doing so, it situated the teenybopper as the most overt segment of the audience that *Freak Out!* is decidedly *not* geared for in terms of mass culture consumption. While Zappa became one of the leading figures in avant-rock as well as one of the counterculture's strongest internal critics, one thing he was in agreement on with as far as rock ideology was its masculinist gender and sexual politics: an issue that became more pronounced on the Mother's second album *Absolutely Free*.

# 8

## Nothing Succeeds Like Excess

*Absolutely Free* (1967) and "Rock Theater"

> Music always is a commentary on society, and certainly the atrocities on stage are quite mild compared to those conducted on behalf of our government. You can't write a chord ugly enough to say what you want to say sometimes, so you have to rely on a giraffe stuffed with whipped cream.[1]
>
> —Frank Zappa

### *"Underground Oratorios":* Absolutely Free

For the Mother's second album *Absolutely Free*, Zappa largely served as the producer and it was not coincidental that the album cover featured a large black and white photo of Zappa staring defiantly at the camera with the rest on the band depicted in a tiny photo collage on the bottom (or rather, "on the margin"). The unofficial name of the band, "Mothers" was written in large, orate letters with "The" and "of Invention" situated directly above and below in small, plain print; this effectively designated the Mothers the all-but-official name of the band. However, production credit went to Zappa and Tom Wilson, who primarily functioned as studio work supervisor. In order to avoid the financial morass of *Freak Out!*—which garnered considerable press but sold poorly—Verve instituted a strict $11,000 cap on studio time and *Absolutely Free* was recorded in three days.

The Mothers' line-up was expanded to include Bunk Gardner (woodwinds), Don Preston (keyboards), and Bully Mundi (drums, percussion).[2] Unlike the original Mothers (Black, Collins, and Estrada) who honed the musical skills in bar bands, the new musicians were formally trained and came from diverse backgrounds. Gardner previously worked in jazz bands, Preston was involved in free jazz and experimental music, and Mundi briefly played timpani in the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra before becoming a studio session musician. Gardner and Preston were also previously acquainted with Zappa, having collaborated on avant-garde/experimental music projects in the early 1960s, while Mundi met Zappa during the *Freak Out!* sessions. Given the larger line-up, the increased level of musicianship, and well-rehearsed performances given the monetary limits placed on recording time, *Absolutely Free* was a considerable advancement over the straightforward if parodic songs and shambolic avant-garde/experimental outings on *Freak Out!*[3] *Absolutely Free* was also the first album that the Zappa brand identity fully emerged: the assemblage of mass music like rock, pop, and doo-wop; anachronistic genres like big band, ragtime, and vaudeville; the theoretical music of free jazz, modern classical, and *musique concrète.* The songs were much more technically complex and tightly structured. Lyrics remained comically rude and caustically political but placed even more emphasis on potential shock, although whether this constituted shock effect or merely shock value becomes an issue for debate.

While divided into songs, each side was presented as medleys with the first side titled "Absolutely Free (#1 in a Series of Underground Oratorios)" and side two "The M.O.I. American Pageant (#2 in a Series of Underground Oratorios)." The opening track "Plastic People" was inspired by a November 12, 1966, confrontation between hippies and police in front of the Los Angeles nightclub Pandora's Box when a protest against a proposed 10:00 p.m. curfew escalated into a riot.[4] By way of comparison, the best-known song based on the incident, Buffalo Springfield's hit "For What It's Worth" (1967), was a straightforward, steady, slow-to-mid tempo folk-rock anthem that ambivalently expressed a cautionary warning that two increasingly contentious factions were emerging as far as generational politics; however, given the assumed audience of Buffalo Springfield, the song effectively sided with the counterculture. In contrast, "Plastic People" (3:45) was a highly disorientating and dense song using the event—which is

specifically cited in the song—to attack not only the Establishment but the counterculture, or at least certain elements of it. As opposed to verse-chorus, “Plastic People” is unorthodoxly structured as follows

Intro
“Plastic People” leitmotif
Interlude—spoken word
“Plastic People” leitmotif
Interlude—spoken word
Verse 1
“Plastic People” leitmotif
Interlude—spoken word
“Plastic People” leitmotif
Interlude—spoken word
Verse 2
“Plastic People” leitmotif
Verse 3
Outro

“Plastic People” begins with the intro, a *highly* dissonant version of “Louie Louie” over which Zappa provides a spoken word segment parodying a speech by the president. The first half of the song is built around a riff although for proposes of analysis is termed a musical and lyrical leitmotif. It has with no discernible meter and could be described as somewhere between Varèse and big band jazz with a lyric line denouncing the titular objects—although it does manifest an odd melodic hook that one can sing along to. It is played five times over the course of “Plastic People” with noticeable variations—the fourth time considerably faster and the fifth time much slower with comical doo-wop and operatic vocals. The interludes are free musical sections over which Zappa provides spoken word commentary, although one suspects these were not improvisations but Zappa-composed sections. In the third interlude, Zappa assumes the persona of a sexually disinterested man turned off by a woman’s gaudy appearance while the fourth interlude makes specific mention to the Pandora’s Box riot. At two other points, before the leitmotif is played the third time and before it is played the fifth/final time, the band plays a rock shuffle based on the “Louie Louie” riff which acts as the first and second verse. In the first verse, the

lyrics specifically attack women as vain consumers while the second verse is directly addressed at the listener passively accepting the underlying authoritarian in American life. A trajectory is constructed between the first verse chastising women, the third interlude expressing similar distain for women, the fourth interlude citing the events at Pandora's Box, the second verse attacking listeners who believe that political changes are being made despite police repression—all interspersed with the "plastic people" leitmotif. Taken together, they reiterate a recurring theme in Zappa's lyrics where, beyond the overall sexism, a cultural and historical view equates the masses with conformity and femininity. As Kelly Fisher Lowe wrote, Zappa is "identifying girls … as the worst kind of offenders, the kind of people who might 'dress for a riot.'"[5] Following the fifth time the leitmotif is played, the third verse appears and the "Louie Louie" shuffle is reframed in a jazz-rock style while the vocals express an individual alienation and resignation that meaningful relationships—or, at the least, satisfying sex—is impossible in a plastic society (i.e., the woman-as-conformist). In what became a Mothers' musical trademark, the song ends with multi-tracked clashing voices speaking and/or singing: they range from gibberish to Zappa occasionally singing the title of the song to the melody of "On Broadway."

*Absolutely Free* also included the return of Suzy Creamcheese on "Son of Suzy Creamcheese," which featured a jarring chorus shifting between one bar of 4/4 and one bar of 9/8 (three times) ending in a four bar 4/4–4/8–5/8–6/8 progression. The measures in 8 parody the "yeah, yeah, yeah!" hook of the Beatles' "She Loves You" as a shifting, ascending pattern rather than steady, descending vocal melody; in this ironic respect, "Son of Suzy Creamcheese" is sung from the perspective of Suzy's jilted boyfriend or, if the listener takes the title literally, an abandoned son. The song explains Suzy is now a pot-smoking, acid-dropping harlot living and protesting in Berkeley. However, Suzy is not committed to social change but simply attracted to the sex, drugs, and rock and roll pseudo-rebellion thrills of hippie lifestyle. Here Lowe argued that "Suzy, in many ways, seems representative of the poseur, the fake hippie wannabe."[6] Indeed, the "evolution" of Suzy from prudish teenybopper on *Freak Out!* to poseur hippie on *Absolutely Free* is such that Suzy represents cultural conformity

and artificiality as a "feminine" trait whether in mainstream culture or counterculture.

*Absolutely Free's* penultimate song is "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," which begins as gritty R&B-rock and over the course of seven-and-a-half minutes frenetically veers from opera, doo-wop, cartoon soundtrack music, 12-tone music, vaudeville, jazz, marches, *musique concrète,* ragtime, and a brief parodic quote of the Beach Boys' "Little Deuce Coupe." (To note, the Beach Boys' "Be True to Your School" was a source of parody for *Absolutely Free*'s "Status Back Baby," in which Zappa assailed the social hierarchies of high school exemplified by jocks and, of course, cheerleaders through an assemblage of doo-wop, a Beach Boys–like vocal line, and a bridge featuring a jazzy saxophone, hard rock guitar, and a quote from Stravinsky's *Petrushka*.) "Brown Shoes" also features a guest appearance by jazz trumpeter Don Ellis playing an atonal, effect-saturated fanfare that suggests a parody of the Beatles' concurrent use of brass and classical music (i.e., "Penny Lane," "All You Need Is Love"). What begins as a general indictment of the middle-class "square" conformist who lives in the suburbs and possesses a strict work ethic ends with a lengthy account of "City Hall Fred" and his sexual fantasies with an underage girl. Kelly Fisher Lowe argued

> There are two possible arguments that can be made about this song. One is that it is an indictment of male power. Zappa is deeply critical of the abuse of power by the white male hegemony…. Another argument can be made … about sexual repression and Zappa's growing awareness that, although he thought sexual freedom was the be-all and end-all of the freak movement, it was not going to happen like that, and in the place of writing thoughtful critiques of the social mores of Americans, Zappa started to believe in shock as the vehicle for his argument.[7]

Given Zappa's career trajectory and considering "Brown Shoes" as part of Zappa's larger musical-political Project/Object, the second argument proves more convincing than the first. As far as Zappa attacking a white male hegemony, Lowe himself argued "Plastic People" targeted women "as the worst offenders" of counterculture pseudo-rebellion and "Son of Suzy

Creamcheese" casts the woman as "the poseur, the fake hippie wannabe." While "Brown Shoes" offers a scenario of political power metaphorically expressed as a pedophilic encounter, the voice of the girl is credited to "Suzy Creamcheese" (voiced by Lisa Cohen, daughter of Zappa's manager Herb Cohen) and rather than protesting she seems to coyly urge the assault on, again returning to the theme that power can only be exercised on a "feminine" conformist mass society because they are "asking for it" from "the Man." Not unrelated, Zappa's political-psychoanalytic analysis of authoritarian society and sexual repression cannot be separated from his on-going lyrical representation of women, frequently reducing them to the equally uncomplimentary categories of Establishment prudes or anti–Establishment sluts, and the dividing line in the Sexual Revolution being a simple matter of whether or not a woman puts out for men.

Despite Zappa's increasing distain for leftist hippie counterculture, his gender-sexual politics were consistent with the contradictions for the counterculture. The counterculture view of sexual revolution was a reductive binary of liberals supporting free love as part of progressive social changes versus conservatives whose Puritanical views resulted in individual and social sexual repression manifest in authoritarian personalities and totalitarianism. However, it was a struggle for sexual liberation in a *male* dominated society that represented male interests and entailed a male sexual superiority over women, an aspect that became a central tenet of rock ideology. As MC5 guitarist Wayne Kramer candidly recounted, "We were sexist bastards…. We had all this rhetoric of being revolutionary…. The boys get to go out to fuck and the girls can't complain about it. And if they did they were being bourgeois bitches … counterrevolutionary."[8]

As a coda to "Brown Shoes," "America Drinks Up and Goes Home" concluded *Absolutely Free*, a mock lounge number recorded to replicate a live recording replete with loud audience and ambient bar noises. The band plays generic cocktail jazz while Ray Collins assumes the persona of a lounge singer sarcastically crooning inane lyrics in an affected vaudeville style while asking the audience if they had a good time, if they heard the songs they wanted to hear, and announcing the last call for the bar. This reiterates the message of "You're Probably Wondering Why I'm Here" from *Freak Out!*—here directed at middle-aged lounge patrons rather than

younger people at clubs or dances—and "You're Probably Wondering" is specifically referenced in "America Drinks Up." In the former song, Zappa assumes the persona of an audience member interjecting a drunken request that the band play "'Caravan" and in the latter song Collins remarks the band happily played all the audience requests, including "'Caravan." As the album's parting shot, it casts the mainstream music audience as intellectually unwilling or unable to comprehend anything beyond popular music pabulum that serves as background for leisure time. In turn, Zappa's brand of avant-rock with the complexities of his musical-political satire become unfathomable for the mass audience and any attempt by Zappa to "enlighten" them is an exercise in futility—even the resort to the musical and lyrical shock of "Brown Shoes."

Zappa was candid about his overall disinterest in writing lyrics (an issue returned to in Chapter 10) and, as Lowe suggested, the increasingly vulgar social commentary became the means while shock became the end in itself. Yet as Peter Bürger contended, "Nothing loses its effectiveness more quickly than shock…. As a result of repetition, it changes fundamentally: there is such as expected shock…. Such a nearly institutionalized shock probably has minimal impact on the way the recipients run their lives. The shock is 'consumed.'"[9] The final irony of *Absolutely Free* is that "America Drinks Up" ends the album by suggesting any shock effect produced, and with "Brown Shoes Don't Make It" in particular, is *already* "consumed" by the listening public into so much lounge treacle before the record even ends. On the next Mothers' album *We're Only In It for the Money* the counterculture audience became the primary target, represented as little better than the mainstream audience as far as their relationship to consumer versus oppositional culture.

### *Shock and Roll: The Mothers and the Anti-Concert*

In part due to ongoing problems in Los Angeles between law enforcement and the hippie scene, the Mothers shifted their base of operations to New York City in the spring of 1967and began a six-month residency at the Garrick Theater, the second floor of the Café au Go Go in Greenwich

Village. Zappa described the venue as "a long, narrow tunnel … that holds 300 people. Easily 102 degrees at all times."[10] While discussed further in Part Three, the May 1966 West Coast tour of the Velvet Underground/Exploding Plastic Inevitable was marked by hostile audience response and strained relationships with promoters; it also originated a long-standing and often bitter feud between Zappa and Lou Reed as the Mothers were the opening band. There was no analog on the West Coast to the Velvet Underground in 1966 whereas the East Coast had a somewhat comparable band to the Mothers in the Fugs. While a folk-rock band whose avant-garde tendencies stemmed from a combination of musical amateurism and overenthusiastic performance, lyrically the Fugs were similar to Zappa as far as offering highly satirical commentaries on sex ("Boobs a Lot," "Group Grope"), drugs ("Couldn't Get High"), the Vietnam War ("Kill for Peace"), or the state of the world in general ("Nothing," a nihilistic chant of condemnation that lists numerous figures from Mikhail Bakunin to *Sing Out!* magazine). As a result, the Mothers found a sympathetic audience in the Greenwich Village milieu that was absent for the Velvets on the Sunset Strip or the Fillmore West.

While the Exploding Plastic Inevitable was a combination of multimedia sensory assault involving rock music, light shows, and performance art that converted the rock concert into a Theater of Cruelty that assaulted the audience aurally, visually, and morally (again, discussed further in Part Three), the Mothers' run at Garrick was more akin to the Dada performances at the Cabaret Voltaire where the shock effect Zappa attempted to generate on record was taken to greater extremes on the stage. While Zappa's claim the Mothers' "invented" rock theater versus the EPI can be debated, he contented they "were really the first band ever to perform rock theater, which was a lot different than today's rock theater…. We never knew what was going to happen. We knew everyone in the band was capable of doing one theatrical event, one concept. Each show was for each audience."[11]

The Mothers' Garrick shows were divided into two "mini-operas," the first "Pigs and Repugnant" and the second "Absolutely Free (An Entertainment)." Zappa's music was increasingly moving into greater complexity and technical demands with Zappa the de facto musical director.

Indeed, Zappa increasingly became the Mothers' frontman by performing the role of "bandleader" and "conductor" in a way that parodied that status yet made it clear he was thoroughly in charge of the ensemble even during the improvisational sections in the otherwise tightly rehearsed performance. Zappa provided pedantic and/or polemical introductions to the songs and also employed verbal and physical instructions to other musicians during the songs. He devised a set of hand singles from simple (pointing and holding up *x* number of fingers to tell a given musician what time signature he wanted the improvisation) to comical (thrusting his middle finger in the air signified playing a high note or making a high-pitched vocal sound) to dramatic (bringing his fist down to signify the musicians should loudly play their lowest notes). Waving his hands and arms up and down and back and forth would guide the tonal or usually atonal variations during the improvisations.[12] In this way, while Zappa could improvise at will, the band was free to improvise under Zappa's dictates.

Moreover, the increasingly unpredictable and shocking elements of the show simply stemmed from seeking to break the monotony of doing the same two shows every night. Jimmy Carl Black recounted:

> In order to keep from getting totally bored … we started to get theatrical…. These girls in the audience had given us a tall, stuffed model of a giraffe. We ran a plastic tube … out through the tail and pointed it, the tail end, at the audience…. We'd gotten several cans of pressurized whipped cream and in the middle of the show … we started squirting whipped cream through the tube. It squirted over at least the first three rows of people and since it was coming out of the giraffe's ass … well, they thought it was a pretty funny thing…. [Zappa] was laughing so hard he had to stop playing.[13]

As longer and complicated instrumentals were becoming a central part of the Mothers' set, and often extended improvisational group and solo passages, Ray Collins began performing comedy routines such as simulating sex with various objects or doing puppet shows with Mothers' roadie/saxophonist Jim "Motorhead" Sherwood. In turn, Sherwood provided extemporaneous monologues—automobile repair was a favored topic—either in-between or in conjunction with the music. Throwing fruits

and vegetables into the audience was not uncommon. The problem was that over the course of a hot summer, the Garrick's air-conditioning was broken and no one was cleaning the venue, resulting in a pervasive stench of sour whipped cream and rotten produce which perhaps added "ambience" to the Dada elements of the Mother's shows.

One infamous performance involved three Marines on leave who wandered into the Garrick during the Mothers' regular afternoon rehearsals. Zappa invited them to attend that evening's show and brought them onstage in full uniform during the Mothers' set. After they did a rousing cover of Bob Dylan's "Rainy Day Woman No. 12 & 35," Zappa ordered them to mutilate a large doll like they would a "gook baby" to the horror of the audience. Zappa recounted another night the audience turnout was so sparse—*three* paying customers—the band simply bought snacks and beverages for those in attendance and chatted rather than perform their regular set; when 10 to 15 people attended a different show, the Mothers invited the audience to take over the stage and play their instruments while they sat in the audience.[14] For another show, Zappa invited Jimi Hendrix and Mitch Mitchell to sit in with the Mothers and Zappa ended up going into the audience simply so he could watch Hendrix play guitar.[15]

In this context, the Mothers were one of the first rock bands to overtly jeopardize the unwritten contract that the band performs the set professionally while the audience responds with respectful enthusiasm. By way of comparison, one can consider the Stooges and their (usually drug-fueled) concerts spearheaded by vocalist/frontman/provocateur Iggy Pop. As well his agitated movements, bodily contortions, and occasional acts of self-mutilation, Pop frequently left the stage and interacted with the audience, sometimes resulting in violent confrontations.[16] Alan Vega, singer for the avant-garde/punk duo Suicide (along with keyboardist Martin Rev), recounted attending a 1970 Stooges concert as a crucial influence on Suicide's own confrontational performances. "Iggy's flying into the audience, then he's back on stage, cutting himself with drumsticks, bleeding…. For the first time in my life the audience and the stage merged into one … and it showed me you didn't have to do static artworks, you could create situations."[17] Vega's use of the word "situations" in describing a Stooges' concert is comparable to how the Situationist International

defined “constructed situations” in *Situationist International* 1 (1957): “A moment of life concretely constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambience and a game of events.”[18] In this way, the Stooges’ concerts as “situations” obliterated the conventions of the rock concert where the band professionally performs the songs and the crowd reacts accordingly within the prescribed limits of appreciation and, above all, safety. When Iggy Pop went from the stage and into the audience, it was not a democratic gesture in the sense of U2’s Bono going into the audience to demonstrate he is the star but also one of the people. Rather, Pop’s disavowal of any separation between band and audience was as much as act of provocation as it was assimilation. The audience was put on notice each person at the concert could be a potential part of the performance/situation as it developed and whether or not they just wanted to sit back and enjoy the band.

If the Stooges’ concerts could be termed “Situationist” and the Mother’s concerts “Dadaist,” the issue with the Mothers dismantling of the stage barrier between performer and audience is how it became another means for Zappa to denigrate his audience under the guise of empowering them. During the Garrick run, a man named Sal Lombardo approached Zappa and asked to join the Mothers despite the fact he had no musical training or skill. Zappa added him as a percussionist although his primary job was the head of “enforced recreation” which Zappa described as “sort of like audience participation, only more dangerous.”[19] Indeed, Zappa’s treatment of the audience was essentially amounted to making the stage a site for public humiliation and a typical Garrick concert “rapidly became an exercise in seeing how many insults and how much abuse the audience could take. People were dragged on-stage and forced to make a speech; young women were brought up and manhandled.”[20]

As the anti-concert approach became integral to live performance, the Mothers performed at Royal Albert Hall in September 1967 (the point in the concert Zappa convinced Don Preston to appropriate the hall’s pipe organ for a version of “Louie Louie” was later released on *Uncle Meat*). The *New Musical Express* review of the show was not so much mixed but internally polarized: “This was the greatest send-up (or down) of pop music, of audience, America, and the group themselves … [but] an entire

concert of biting ridicule—however well done—is just a bore."[21] As the *NME* review suggested, the Dada element of the Mothers' concerts was not simply the derisive chaos and theatrical weirdness. Man Ray one remarked that goal of Dada was to "try the spectators' patience."[22] As important, Dada performances sought to provoke hostile audience reactions rather than complacency. When a Dada performance in Zurich took place in April 1919, it was greeted with outrage and at one point the enraged audience stormed the stage causing a twenty minute delay until order was restored; Tristan Tzara summarized the night as Dada's "final victory." While Zappa and the Mothers made a concerted effort to try the spectator's patience, for the most part the audience response was taking whatever mistreatment was dished out. As part of his critique of mass culture, Zappa's rock theater exposed that a rock fan's patience, passivity, and capacity for punishment were seemingly limitless in the name of rock concert entertainment.

Michel Delville and Andrew Norris used the term "maximalist" in discussing Zappa's work, a term that serves as the antithesis of the minimalism of their chief contemporary avant-rock rival, the Velvet Underground. Paul Hegarty noted that "Maximalism conveys the *excess* of [Zappa's] music."[23] Indeed, this excess defined Zappa's musical-political project as a whole by the late 1960s. Musically, it became an excess of notes, an excess of time and key signature changes, an excess of genre parody and stylistic shifts within and between songs, an excess of instrumentation, an excess of voices, an excess of dissonance, an excess of noise, and an excess of experimental interruptions. Lyrically, there was an excess of comedy, an excess of commentary, an excess of sarcasm, and an excess of vulgarity. In concert, there was an excess of theatrics, an excess of unpredictability, and an excess of unprofessionalism. Above all, on record as well as in concert, there was an excess of shock and an excess of abuse as much as an excess of confrontation.

# 9

## The Conscience of a (Practical) Conservative

*We're Only in It for the Money* (1968)

I'm not against counterculture. I'm against things that are *fake*.[1]

—Frank Zappa

### *"Are You Hung Up?":* We're Only in It for the Money *as Concept Album*

Following the Garrick Theater run, Ray Collins left the Mothers of Invention, weary of the increasing complex and comedic direction of the Mothers (he returned to assist on *Cruising with Ruben & the Jets* as well as appearing in previously recorded material that was compiled into subsequent Mothers' releases). Zappa consolidated the position as lead vocalist as well as lead guitarist, with Zappa's vocal style always tending towards a half-spoken/half-sung delivery drenched in sarcasm as opposed to Collin's more conventional rock singing. Zappa also further expanded the line-up of the Mothers, making Jim "Motorhead" Sherwood a full-time member on saxophone, percussion, and back-up vocals as well as adding Ian Underwood, a keyboardist/woodwind player with an M.A. in music composition from UC-Berkeley.

During the recording of the next Mothers of Invention album, the Beatles released *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, which prompted Zappa to devise his own concept album in response, or, more correctly, retaliation. The resulting *We're Only in It for the Money* parodied *Sgt. Pepper* at several levels and most overtly the cover art, although it did not so much turn *Sgt.*

*Pepper* on its head but turned it inside out. Zappa wanted to parody the album cover exactly, but a disagreement between Zappa and Paul McCartney not only complicated matters but reflected their philosophies on art and commerce. McCartney was bothered by Zappa seeming indifference to music as art as Zappa repeatedly referred to the recordings as "product." Conversely, while McCartney was offended by the term "product," he informed Zappa the cover art was an issue for the managers and record companies to iron out and an irritated Zappa lectured McCartney on how artists should be telling the managers and record companies what to do and not the other way around.[2] Moreover, Zappa recorded his first solo album *Lumpy Gravy* as a one-off deal for Capitol in 1967 and MGM/Verve filed suit for breach of contract, forcing Capitol to recall the album. Verve eventually bought the master tapes and rights from Capitol and a vastly reedited, remixed version of *Lumpy Gravy* was released after *Money* by Verve in 1968 (discussed further next chapter). With the matter unresolved at the time, business relations were already strained between Capitol and Verve regarding Zappa.

Ultimately, Verve decided to use the inner full-gatefold photo of the Mothers wearing archaic women's clothing that parodied *Sgt. Pepper's* gatefold photo of the Beatles in psychedelic marching-band attire as the front and back cover. Zappa's satire and indictment of "fake" counterculture entailed conflating the "inauthentic" with the "feminine" by depicting the band as sexually repressed "old maids" (facial hair notwithstanding).[3] The collage photo parodying *Sgt. Pepper's* front cover and the parody of *Sgt. Pepper's* back cover was used as *Money*'s inner gatefold artwork. While *Sgt. Pepper* became synonymous with the utopian aspirations of 1967 and the Summer of Love, *Money* was a caustic indictment of counterculture as well as the Establishment in the context of 1968: among those appearing in the collage parody on *Money* were Barbie, Lenny Bruce, Sgt. Nick Fury, Jimi Hendrix, Lyndon Johnson, Lee Harvey Oswald, Soupy Sales, Rod Serling, Nancy Sinatra, and the Statue of Liberty. Moreover, the blue sky of *Sgt. Pepper* is replaced by a black sky and a lightning bolt, signifying the Summer of Love of 1967 had become a raging thunderstorm by 1968. For added measure, while "Beatles" is written on the ground in red flowers, "Mothers" is spelled out with a variety of red, rotten fruits and vegetables.

His own emphasis on studio composition notwithstanding, Zappa made extensive and even excessive use of the studio as far as effects, overdubbing, and tape editing to parody the studio-centric approach of *Sgt. Pepper*. Moreover, Zappa inadvertently discovered the strings of the grand piano at Apostolic Studios—where parts of *Money* were recorded during the Garrick Theater run—reverberated if someone spoke adjacent to the piano. Zappa came up with idea of recording various "piano people" and their improvised monologues based on random topics suggested by Zappa accompanied by the resonant drones of the piano strings. These experiments became part of the several "dialog tracks" connecting songs or abruptly inserted into the songs to effectively interrupt them, not unlike Bertolt Brecht's alienation effect of breaking the theatrical illusion of reality by having actors directly address the audience out of character or combining realistic and unrealistic *mise-en-scène*. The album begins with "Are You Hung Up?," a *musique concrète* piece with "piano person" Eric Clapton spouting hippie catchphrases, followed by studio engineer Gary Kellgren's heavily reverb and echo-treated whispering as he sardonically extolls the "genius" of Frank Zappa, and ending with a cliché backwards guitar solo. Kellgren's ruminations appear intermittently thorough *Money* and especially function as a kind of Brechtian inner-commentary on the album itself.

"Are You Hung Up?" cuts to "Who Needs the Peace Corps?" a typically complex song that effectively captured Zappa's hybrid musical style and social commentary lyrics. However, unlike the ostensibly anti–Establishment slant of *Freak Out!* and *Absolutely Free*, "Peace Corps" is not necessarily referring to the U.S. government organization but the "peace and love corps" of the hippie movement. It is a scathing critique of the counterculture experience as migrating to San Francisco, dressing in hippie fashions, contracting sexually transmitted diseases, getting beat up by police, and high-tailing it back home.[4] "Flower Punk" was a direct parody of the Leaves' "Hey Joe" with the verse guitar riff of the Troggs' "Wild Thing" thrown in at one point for added measure. Tape-speed manipulations were used to render the vocals and wah-wah organ highly cartoonish and the lyrics expressed another indictment of favored hippie pastimes like getting high and love-ins as pointless pseudo-rebellion.

Less overtly, psychedelic rock and its world-view in the wake of *Sgt. Pepper* was mercilessly satirized throughout *Money*. If *Absolutely Free* was arguably Zappa's most concerted anti–Establishment album of the 1960s, the self-referential title "Absolutely Free" mocked hippie metaphysical enlightenment. A psychedelic song with a languid 3/4 tempo, albeit punctuated with the trademark array of abrupt tempo and time signature changes, it included a lush piano introduction, verses layered with acoustic guitars and celesta, myriad spacy electronic effects undercut by moments of corny doo-wop backing vocals, Zappa introducing the song by explaining to the listener what the word "discorporate" means, and rattling off the names of Santa's reindeer during one verse as a sarcastic commentary on the counterculture's fascination with the mystical and the mythological.[5]

If "Absolutely Free" could be heard as a jibe at "trippy songs" like Lennon's "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," "Let's Make the Water Turn Black" could be taken as his shot at McCartney's "Lovely Rita" and other whimsical, psychedelic story songs of the era where the lyrics centered on narratives and third person characters (e.g., Donovan, the Kinks, or Syd Barrett-era Pink Floyd; "Absolutely Free" also contained a sardonic lyrical reference to Donovan's "Mellow Yellow"). While a bouncy psychedelic-pop song, "Water" also derives its rapid-fire vocal delivery style from patter songs and comic opera. Despite the surface strangeness of the lyrics, "Water" was essentially a factual account of Ronnie and Kenny Williams. As well as the former being a musical associate of Zappa, the brothers were Zappa's neighbors in the early 1960s, and the song chronicled their various pastimes—in lyrically veiled but highly interpretable terms if one was familiar with teenage slang—that ranged from lighting flatulence, smearing snot on windows, making bootleg alcohol, and urinating in jars as opposed to using a toilet. As a mordant punchline, the song concludes with the listener learning Ronny is now in the military while Kenny is abusing drugs.

However, Verve summarily edited out a set of lyrics in "Water" that they believed were a reference to menstruation (they were actually a description of a waitress filling napkin dispensers and writing customer orders in a notepad), which is to say they removed any allusion to women's biological cycles while leaving in myriad displays of boorish male behavior. Zappa's

frustration with Verve's post-production editing of *Money* without his knowledge yet alone consent was best expressed when he was in Europe accepting a technical achievement award for *Money*. After he heard the edited version of "Water" during the ceremony Zappa told the audience, "I can't accept this statue. I prefer the award be given to the guy who modified the record, because what you're hearing is more reflective of his work than mine."[6]

As "Water" concludes, a smarmy mock DJ voice supplied by engineer Dick Kunc makes the transition to the next song, albeit prefaced by a burst of loud, distorted vocal gibberish. "The Idiot Bastard Son" is another parodic story song similar to "Absolutely Free" as far as being done as a psychedelic waltz while also making lyrical references to the previous song "Water." It becomes a commentary that rock songs played "on the radio" are more or less the same despite the surface differences. "The Idiot Bastard Son" details the sad life of the moronic, illegitimate offspring of a right-wing Congressman and a prostitute. The song is occasionally punctuated by a loud, distorted groan as the woeful voice of the title character and entirely interrupted with a dialogue track of multiple, effects-treated voices (0:48–1:15) with one bragging about his alcohol consumption. While Verve took considerable liberties in editing out what were deemed offensive lyrics throughout *Money*, one line that could easily be interpreted as the title character masturbating in church got by the record company. Near the end of the song the lyrics shift in tone and Zappa directly addresses the listener while singing the lilting waltz-time melody, berating them over their basic intellectual inability to grasp the meaning behind the song.

While the counterculture bore the brunt of Zappa's satire on *Money*, this is not to say he let the Establishment off the hook. "Concentration Moon" was a song about a dystopian America where hippies are placed in concentration camps. The song alternates between two sections: a 3/4 vaudeville/doo-wop parody sung from the perspective of an interred hippie longing for the good old days alternating with a 4/4 bubblegum-pop parody describing the arrests and executions of hippies. "Concentration Moon" is also interrupted midway through by a Kellgren commentary about working with Zappa, although his reference to the Velvet Underground being "as shitty a group as Frank Zappa's group"—Kellgren was an engineer on *White Light/White*

*Heat* and refused to stay in the studio during the recording of "Sister Ray"—was yet another part edited out of *Money* by Verve without Zappa's approval. Ironically, one of the more poignant moments of *Money* was a song in which Zappa toned down the excess of musical complexity and lyrical sarcasm in favor of sincerity and simplicity. "Mom and Dad" was a straightforward, poignant rock ballad pointedly addressed to parents who would seemingly rather see their children killed by the police rather than continue to live a hippie lifestyle.

As discussed in the last chapter, *Absolutely Free* closed with the ambitious genre assemblages and highly vulgar lyrics of "Brown Shoes Don't Make It" followed by the lounge music parody, "America Drinks Up and Goes Home." *Money* ended with Zappa's response to the epic "A Day in the Life" through the *musique concrète* piece "The Chrome Plated Megaphone of Destiny." The album's liner note instructed the listener to read Franz Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" before listening to "CPMD." "In the Penal Colony" is a nightmarish short story about a torture machine that slowly kills condemned prisoners by carving the words of the law they have broken into their bodies. Using atonal pianos, mechanistic percussion, electronic sounds, and studio effects "CMPD" can be heard as Zappa's attempt to sonically represent the torture machine in operation with the torture being inflicted on the listener not unlike the on-stage "enforced recreation" audience members underwent during the Mothers' run at the Garrick Theater. Midway through "CPMD" waves of maniacal, mechanical laughter dominate the song, the voices distorted by tape-speed variations, echo, and other electronic effects. The mechanical laughter signifies the sadistic glee of the torturers—again representing Zappa and the Mothers inflicting musical torture on the listener.

As the finale of *Money*, Michel Delville and Andrew Norwood contented this segment constituted "forced hilarity which is not laughter, but the *sound* of laughter."[7] Paul Hegarty took a more critical position, arguing that Zappa ends up trying to have it both ways with "CPMD" in that the laughter becomes "an ironic distancing, a metacommentary—an indication that the preceding humour has purpose, critical intent … a humour that is too low to be ironic, and then a knowing ironic sense that not all the preceding humour might be that funny."[8] In either case, "CMPD" pulls the

rug out from under the listener and, more specifically, the Mothers' assumed counterculture audience. *Freak Out!* and *Absolutely Free* provided the listener with a degree of space where they could laugh with the freaks mocking the Establishment and as well as their mass culture consumer—be it the squares or the teenyboppers. With *Money*, Zappa made the counterculture the butt of the musical-political joke by representing both hippies as the Establishment as part of the problem and neither side the solution. It concludes with a distancing mocking laughter *laughing at the listener* within a framework of the difficult listening of avant-garde/experimental music rather than musically accessible and overtly comic psychedelic pop/rock parodies. The overall joke becomes exhausted and laughter itself is negated as an authentic expression of opposition or resistance—a *reified laughter* as studio-generated laughter or a laugh track signifying laughter without content. Ultimately, laughter that could be generated by *Money* that conformed to contemporary us versus them political struggles—liberals vs. conservatives, hippies vs. squares, counterculture vs. Establishment—was the artificial laughter of a bad conscience.

While discussing 19th century France and the avant-garde's relationship to the 1848 Revolution, in certain respects T.J. Clark's assessment could be referring to the 1960s counterculture and its relationship to the avant-garde.

> What really mattered most was the ease of transition from attitude to attitude, style, posture to imposture…. In such a world, being *avant-garde* was just an institutionalized variant of everyone's gambit. It was a kind of initiation rite—a trek out into the bush for a while, then a return to the privileged world from which you had left. It was a finishing school, an unabashed form of social climbing…. We need also distinguish the *avant-garde* from Bohemia: they fought, for a start, on different sides of the barricades … the Bohemians with the insurrection and the avant-garde … with the forces of order. We need to unearth the real Bohemia from the *avant-garde*'s fantasy of it.[9]

Zappa's acerbic critique of the counterculture on *Money* resonates with what Clark described and why Zappa took particular exception to *Sgt. Pepper* as an intersection of rock and the avant-garde. Zappa was highly

skeptical, if not outright cynical, of rock musicians who claimed they were in it for pure artistic expression and/or promoting mass social change rather than the financial benefits. The avant-garde of *Sgt. Pepper* was coupled with a message of social change around utopian promise as opposed to revolutionary action, and whether high-modernist or postmodernist *Sgt. Pepper* became rock's first highbrow rock album precisely at a time when the avant-garde was becoming bourgeois culture in the 1960s. In this respect, the ostensibly apolitical McCartney represented the emerging avant-garde order while Lennon soon after vociferously allied himself with Bohemia and the insurrection.

*Money* became an indictment of a counterculture that was always-already over-the-counter culture marketing pseudo-rebellion, and while Zappa often overemphasized his attacks on the mediocrity of the mass audience rather than the machinations of the culture industry, in the case of *Money* it become appropriate that the last laugh is generated at the expense of the listener. William L. O'Neill suggested one factor in the collapse of the counterculture was "the gullibility—innocence perhaps—of the deviant young…. Because the rock bandits smoked pot and talked a revolutionary game, they were supposed to be different from other entertainers…. The difference between a rock king and a robber baron was about six inches of hair."[10] The Beatles were the most successful rock band in the world and could afford—in *both* senses of the word—to dabble in the avant-garde as a sort of "finishing school, an unabashed form of social climbing" by which they could rebrand themselves as not only counterculture hippies but the unification of modernist and popular culture signified by *Sgt. Pepper's* front cover as much as the music. In the process, *Sgt. Pepper* not only became the avant-grade's fantasy of Bohemia as a phantasmal utopia of peace and love, but Bohemia's fantasy of the avant-garde as psychedelic pop and rock layered with a sheen of (post)modernist aspiration. With *Money*, Zappa demystified the counterculture's dalliance with the avant-garde by using their cultural signifiers against each other.

### ***Strange Bedfellows: Zappa and the Monkees***

As Zappa assumed the role of the counterculture's harshest internal critic, in particular the hippie romanticism that *Sgt. Pepper* and the Beatles came to signify, he formed an unlikely relationship with the Monkees, a band specifically created by the culture industry to star in a sitcom and allow a marketing crossover between TV and popular music. As a sitcom, *The Monkees* was critically hailed for its unorthodox formal style (non-continuity editing, jump-cuts, film speed manipulation, musical performance segments that pioneered music video). John Lennon compared the show favorably to the Marx Brothers. With typical hyperbole, Timothy Leary proclaimed, "The four young Monkees … went along with the system but didn't buy it … burlesquing the very shows that glue Mom and Dad to the set during primetime…. And woven into the fast-moving stream of psychedelic action were the prophetic, holy, challenging words."[11] However, the Monkees' recordings were widely disparaged as inauthentic pop/bubblegum music shamelessly derivative of the early Beatles expressly catering to the teenybopper market.[12] Mike Nesmith recounted that Frank Zappa one of the few people who came to Monkees' defense. "When people hated us more than anything he said kind things about us. He was talking about the music, about how well it was produced."[13] What could be inferred is Zappa may have respected the Monkees for being well-produced as a quality pop music *product* as opposed being good music.

The penultimate episode of *The Monkees*, "The Monkees Blow their Minds" (1968) began with a cold opening of Zappa dressed as Mike Nesmith (stocking hat and blue shirt) and Nesmith dressed as Zappa (wig, false moustache, and a fake nose that repeatedly fell off during the improvised conversation). Highlights included Nesmith-as-Zappa deriding the Monkees' music as "banal and insipid" and later Nesmith-as-Zappa pointed out to Zappa-as-Nesmith, "*You're* a popular musician—I'm dirty, gross, and ugly." Nesmith-as-Zappa then suggested he show Zappa-as-Nesmith "how to play a car" in reference to Zappa's 1963 appearance on *The Steve Allen Show* in which Zappa's demonstration of playing a bicycle was used by Allen to disparage not only Zappa but avant-garde/experimental music in general. Playing themselves in the following short segment using jump-cuts and sped-up film, Nesmith parodied Zappa's on-stage conducting style while Zappa assaulted a car with a chain,

sledgehammer, and fire extinguisher as excerpts of the Mothers' "Mother People" played in the background.[14]

Zappa also had a cameo in the Monkees' film *Head*, a film deliberately designed to destroy the Monkees' teenybopper popular image. As well as its incomprehensible structure, *Head* featured numerous jokes about the Monkees as a culture industry manufacture and strident anti-war commentary, exemplified in a montage sequence of the Monkees in tuxedos performing "Circle Sky," concert footage of screaming Monkees' fans, and news footage of Vietnam. Following an old-fashioned Davy Jones' song and dance routine number (cf. "Your Mother Should Know" from *Magical Mystery Tour*), Zappa is seen walking a cow off the soundstage. He pauses in order to tell Jones the dancing was good, but "the song was pretty white" and recommends he concentrate more of the music because "the youth of America depend on you to show the way."

At one level, the Zappa-Monkees alliance was one of mutual advantage and, not coincidentally, Zappa's appearance on *The Monkees* coincided with the release of his anti-counterculture broadside *Money* the same month. As the Monkees attempted to rebrand themselves from a manufactured pop band with an assumed audience of teenyboppers to an authentic rock band with counterculture appeal, a move that inevitably entailed a fair degree of self-deprecation, Zappa lent subversive cultural capital. For Zappa, it was an opportunity for additional national exposure to perpetuate his own counterculture image and mock the Monkees as far as signifying pop hokum. As noted, while Zappa defended the Monkees, it seemed less of a case of respecting the Monkees' music but respecting the fact that the Monkees' were honest about making *well-produced* pop music expressly designed for mass consumption, echoing Zappa's own view that popular music was a means of making money, not creating art or prompting social change. Zappa could join the criticism of the Monkees as inauthentic and manufactured while pointing out much of said criticism was applicable to the counterculture and rock music, whether Timothy Leary's hyperbolic praise of the Beatles as "avatars of a new world order" or the underground press of the late 1960s touting the Rolling Stones as "rock revolutionaries." As Zappa later summarized his disdain for the era:

> When rock and roll first appeared, adults were completely hostile towards it. Now they aerobicize to it. The people who performed it—as well as the consumers—were thought of as an undesirable element…. Then the sixties came along…. With a sickening crunch, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones became household words in America…. During this period it was discovered that millions—perhaps billions—of dollars could be made by selling circular pieces of black plastic in a cardboard sandwich with a stupid picture on the front.[15]

### *Practical Conservatism: Zappa and the Problem of Politics*

In the end, *Money* became Zappa's statement on the hypocrisy rather than the contradiction of rock music branding itself as opposed to the Establishment while it became an integral part of capitalist-consumer culture. Unlike John Lennon's campaign to "sell peace" to the world or Mick Jagger's revolutionary posturing on songs like "Street Fighting Man," Zappa's musical product offered coarse criticism of contemporary American life but Zappa was never completely in tune with dominant counterculture ideology as a kind of idealized collectivist anarchism or Western communism. Indeed, *Money*'s attack on the counterculture as pseudo-rebellion not only stemmed from Zappa's pessimistic view of mass culture, but the schism in Zappa's own political views. In a 1969 interview with *Down Beat* Zappa remarked, "I was invited to speak at the London School of Economics…. So there's a bunch of youthful British leftists who take the same leftist view the world over. It's like belonging to a car club…. Basing their principles on Marxist doctrine this or Mao Tse-tung that…. It's really depressing to sit in front of a large number of people and have them all be that stupid, all at once."[16]

The perceived radicalism of Zappa's politics had more to do with the rhetoric and stridency in making his arguments, be it through satirical lyrics or interview polemics. In his autobiography *The Real Frank Zappa Book* (1990), Zappa defined his political philosophy as "practical conservatism" with his views tending towards the right on economic policies and the left

on foreign policy and social politics. Among the views Zappa expressed included abolition of federal income tax in favor of a national sales tax, minimal federal bureaucracy, citizen-funded social programs (i.e., Social Security insurance as opposed to welfare or general assistance), trade-based over military-based foreign policy initiatives, legalization of drugs, unconditional First Amendment rights, a strong distain for Communism, and a strict separation of Church and State.[17] While he shared the counterculture's antipathy for authoritarianism and abhorrence of square morality, which were two sides of the same political coin for Zappa (infused with prevailing counterculture sexism), he had little sympathy for hippie collectivism and idealism. As staunchly anti–Communist as he was pro-capitalist, Zappa's politics tended to be closer to a Cold War Democrat like Harry S. Truman than a hippie radical like Abbie Hoffman.

As *Money* ruptured counterculture ideology and exposed its shortcomings as a revolutionary movement, it was perhaps inevitable Zappa's politics became subject of debate and whether Zappa was an Establishment opportunist in freak clothing or an uncompromising critic of American culture, politics, and society. Barry Miles contended that "Zappa focused his satire not on the right-wing of power, but liberal values and hypocrisy…. He was more content to mock hippies and groupies that to criticize the Vietnam War…. Zappa responded to the world around him with a sardonic humor … rather than the righteous anger of Bob Dylan."[18] Taking an opposing view, Kelly Fisher Lowe argued, "For all of the songs … that might be considered critical of women, homosexuals, labor unions, and other groups, Zappa saved the majority of his criticism … for white, middle-class men … who, as Zappa's satire reveals, have largely stolen, corrupted, or otherwise misplaced the American Dream."[19]

The problem for both Miles and Lowe is their insistence on reading Zappa's satirical social commentary around the traditional American liberal-conservative binary that was not necessarily applicable to gauge Zappa as what could be termed a neoliberal. For Miles, Zappa's criticism of the hippie counterculture and liberal idealism necessarily meant Zappa became a conservative apologist. To be sure, Zappa expressed his political outrage through sarcasm and satire and treated the counterculture with equal, if not greater, derision than the Establishment. While *Money* offered pointed

attacks on the Haight-Ashbury hippie counterculture ("Who Needs the Peace Corps?" and "Flower Punk"), *Freak Out!*, *Absolutely Free* and *Money* all contained equally pointed attacks on the Establishment—or, more correctly, those who represented it—with songs like "It Can't Happen Here," "Brown Shoes Don't Male It," "Concentration Moon," or "Mom and Dad." Lowe's argument that the crux of Zappa's criticism was directed at a power elite of white, middle-class men minimizes that extent that Zappa's politically incorrect lyrics frequently expressed a retrograde ethnic, gender, and sexual politics (any satire notwithstanding). Indeed, *Money* included the song "Harry, You're a Beast," a virulent attack on women as the epitome of rampant consumerism, mass culture phoniness, and apparently the most egregious thing for Zappa, sexual repression.[20]

Assessing the potential pitfalls of Zappa's satire, David Walley argued that satire "uses culture's sexual, philosophical, or technological artifacts as a reflecting mirror. Good satire provides enlightenment, but poor satire degenerates into cant, ultimately leading to a bleakness of visions … the visions of horror are never transforming, just ugly."[21] Ultimately, Zappa's brand of satirical social criticism, whether attacking liberals or conservatives, often settled on assailing an ignorant and obedient citizenry who get the authoritarian society, moral rigidness, economic exploitation, and meaningless mass culture they deserve and not the determining social formations of the State, the Church, big business, or the culture industry. As Zappa put it, "Some scientists claim that hydrogen … is the basic building block of the universe. I dispute that. I say there is more stupidity than hydrogen, and *that* is the basic building block of the universe."[22]

# 10

## Project/Object

### Zappa, Mass Culture and Postmodernism

> It's all one album…. If I had all the master tapes I could take a razor blade and cut them apart and put them together in a different order [and] it would still make one piece of music…. I could do this twenty times. The material is definitely related.[1]
>
> —Frank Zappa, on "No Commercial Potential"

### *"No Commercial Potential": The Mothers as Project/Object*

"Project/Object" was Zappa's view that any one part of his creative output (project) was inherently related to the rest of his career output (the object). However, the Project/Object method was not specifically limited to the interchangeably and self-referencing of music and lyrics. Project/Object could include recurring characters, narratives, and themes (such as Suzy Creamcheese), spoken word, interviews, found recordings, producing and releasing records by other performers, and performances in other mediums and the public sphere in general (Zappa's guest appearance on *The Monkees* coinciding with the release of *We're Only in It for the Money*, his attack on the counterculture and especially the Beatles).[2] In terms of Zappa's early work and his critique of mass culture, David Wragg offered a productive appraisal. "'Project/object' entails work on the culture industry's preexisting signifiers, musical and otherwise. Zappa's use of collage/montage techniques … enabled him to defamiliarise and satirize

existing musical sounds and styles, and other social signifiers such as bits and pieces of dialogue."[3]

While *Money* became one of Zappa's more famous and critically well-received albums, he considered it the second part of a four album cycle dubbed "No Commercial Potential." The first volume was Zappa's debut solo album, *Lumpy Gravy*, an album of complex instrumental music by the "Abnucleas Emuuka Electric Symphony Orchestra"—essentially some of the Mothers augmented with a plethora of Los Angeles session musicians with Zappa acting as the orchestra's conductor. As touched on last chapter, Zappa recorded it as a one-time only project for Capitol Records in 1967, but MGM/Verve claimed *Lumpy Gravy* was a violation of Zappa's contract; the album was recalled until the situation was resolved with Verve buying the master tapes from Capitol. During the recording of *Money*, Zappa drastically edited and remixed *Lumpy Gravy* which was re-released on Verve in 1968, shortly after *Money*'s release although Zappa considered *Lumpy Gravy* the predecessor of *Money*. The first side of the revised *Lumpy Gravy* opens with what sounds like a deranged theme for a TV detective show ("Duodenum") and ends with an orchestral piece highly influenced by Varèse ("I Don't Know if I Can Go Through This Again"). In between there is a plethora of musical segments raging from off-kilter lounge music ("Oh No" which is reprised as "Oh No Again") to *musique concrète* and astringent dialog segments culled from the "piano people" recordings made during the *Money* sessions, all edited to form rapid-fire sound montages.

The third volume of "No Commercial Potential" was *Cruising with Ruben & the Jets* (1968), a highly accessible album that satirized the doo-wop genre.[4] Zappa noted, "I conceived that album along the same lines of Stravinsky's neoclassical period. If he could take the clichés and conventions of the classical era and pervert them, why not do the same with the rules and regulations of doo-wop."[5] Satirical intent notwithstanding, the album was received in some quarters as the work of a bone-fide 1950s band, although a clear giveaway was the album cover art depicting the Mothers as cartoon dogs with the Zappa character saying in a word balloon, "Is this the Mothers of Invention recording under a different name in a last ditch attempt to get their cruddy music on the radio?" In fact, four of the more conventional songs from *Freak Out!*—"Anyway the Wind Blows,"

“You Didn’t Try to Call Me,” “How Could I Be Such a Fool?” and “I’m Not Satisfied”—were re-recorded as doo-wop numbers for *Ruben & the Jets*.

The fourth and final installment of “No Commercial Potential” was *Uncle Meat* (1969), the soundtrack for a shelved Mothers of Invention film intended as an additional component of the “No Commercial Potential” project/object.[6] It was also the first Zappa album released through his own label Bizarre Records in a distribution deal with Warner Bros./Reprise Records (the business side of Zappa’s career to be considered at length shortly). *Uncle Meat* was compiled from numerous live and studio recordings and edited by Zappa to construct one of the most experimental and varied—or self-indulgent and unfocused—of the Mothers’ releases.[7] A musical documentary of the Mothers’ career without resorting to a compilation or “greatest hits” collection, *Uncle Meat* included “If We’d All Been Living in California…’” which was an excerpt of an actual argument between Zappa and Jimmy Carl Black about the band’s financial arraignments (according to Black, taped without his knowledge) followed by “The Air,” a cheesy doo-wop parody that amounted to Zappa’s riposte to Black’s concerns as so much hot air. “Louie Louie” was a cut-up version of the song recorded at Royal Albert Hall. The “live track” is largely Zappa’s intro in which he encourages Don Preston to play the hall’s pipe organ for the song and Zappa’s outro describing the Mothers as the London Symphony Orchestra with a tape loop of applause with the live segments are bridged by a short, free form saxophone improvisation. A shambolic version of “God Bless America” recorded live at the Whiskey a Go Go was followed by “A Pound for a Brown on the Bus,” a short avant-garde musical composition dating back to the late 1950s Zappa wrote for string quartet. It was rearranged for rock band and a studio recording with dissonant keyboards and woodwinds clashing over a static beat. The title came from an incident when the Mothers were in England and Jimmy Carl Black offered Bunk Gardner a pound note to moon people while they were on a bus. Gardner earned the money.

*Uncle Meat* also features the final appearances of recurring character Suzy Creamcheese on three dialog tracks (voiced by Pamela Zarubica). On “The Voice of Cheese” Suzy despondently recounted how she abysmally failed

making the scene with surfers, beatniks, groupies, and the London underground and now hangs out with the Mothers as they are the only people who can still tolerate her. “Our Bizarre Relationship” featured Suzy jokingly describing herself as the sexually repressed maid of a rock star (voiced by Zappa) as she extolls his renowned success with groupies, congratulates him on making the older neighborhood squares jealous, and ruminates on the epidemic of crabs the two are spreading throughout Laurel Canyon. “Ian Underwood Whips it Out” was a live recording of the Mothers, a free jazz improvisation featuring Underwood’s saxophone shrieks and squawks. The music was prefaced by a short recollection by Underwood of how he joined the Mothers. He began by introducing himself as the “straight” person in the band followed with Suzy Creamcheese’s blasé response of “Wowie Zowie!”

*Uncle Meat* concluded with the six part “King Kong,” a jazz-rock instrumental influenced by Miles Davis’ contemporary work combining rock instrumentation with jazz improvisation that took up the entirety of side four (18:12).[8] Despite the unwieldy subtitles, the piece’s structure is essentially that of jazz, or an early example of what would be popularized with more virtuosity and more tonal blandness as jazz-rock fusion. Part one was “King Kong Itself (as played by the Mothers in the studio)” and an opening musical theme in 3/8. While the rhythm section maintained the 3/8 jazz rhythm, the second part “King Kong (Its magnificence interpreted by Dom DeWild)” was a brief electric piano solo by Preston followed by the third part “King Kong (as Motorhead explains it),” a short, free saxophone solo by Sherwood. The substantially longer fourth part, “King Kong (the Gardner Varieties”) featured an electric saxophone solo by Gardner. Through the use of a fuzz box and octave division, Gardner modified the saxophone sound to resemble a distorted bassoon that effectively doubled his saxophone lines into a strange duet. The fleeting fifth part “King Kong (as played by 3 deranged Good Humor trucks)” was a *musique concrète* piece in which the basic track is overwhelmed with gongs and clanking bells modified with tape-speed manipulations. Culled from a segment in *Lumpy Gravy*, it connected the studio version of “King Kong” to the final part with the self-explanatory title “King Kong (played live on a flatbed diesel truck in the middle of a racetrack at the Miami Pop Festival—the Underwood ramifications).” The live version has a feel closer to 6/8 than

3/8 with loud percussion accompaniment (tambourine, maracas) backing a free saxophone solo by Underwood that breaks down into ensemble free playing and a short drum solo before the song fades out.

To construct a thematic trajectory of "No Commercial Potential," *Lumpy Gravy* was Zappa's formalist exercise as an eclectic and parodic survey of his musical influences combined through stylistic juxtaposition and studio composition; whether this amounted to pastiche can be debated as well. *Money* served as his satirical commentary on the counterculture and psychedelic rock, functioning as a distancing gesture between Zappa and the counterculture world-view Zappa saw as idealistic and insincere in contrast to his practical conservatism. *Ruben* became his backhanded compliment to his popular music roots, an album of "perverted" doo-wop that was simultaneously homage and satire. *Uncle Meat* represented a darkly humorous historical account of the Mothers' career and, not coincidentally, was the last album with the original Mothers' line-up.

### *The Zappa Brand: Post-Mothers and Project/Object*

Following *Uncle Meat*, Zappa disbanded the Mothers on the grounds that carrying an ever-expanding band as salaried musicians was becoming economically unfeasible, although given the evolution of the music it is not surprising Zappa jettisoned a full-time band in favor of a shifting pool of technically proficient musicians that could accurately execute his compositions as needed and musicians he could hire and, if need be, fire at will. Zappa recounted, "The guys in the [Mothers] were pissed off—as if their welfare had been cancelled."[9] Given the rigorous demands placed on the Mothers as far as working musicians, it was rather disingenuous for Zappa's to suggest that the Mothers were little more than "welfare bums" sponging off Zappa's work. Don Preston pointed out that "[Zappa] used to get very angry when people would respond more to the solos than compositions…. Sometimes during a concert [we] would play three or four songs. The rest would all be improvisation…. I think he wanted more kinds of control on the music."[10] In a 1969 *Down Beat* interview that coincided with the disbanding of the Mothers, Larry Kart asked Zappa about the

"gestures of contempt towards the audience" and the Dada aspects of the show to which Zappa sharply replied

> The typical rock fan isn't smart enough to know he is being dumped on, so it doesn't make any difference…. Those kids wouldn't know music if it came up and bit 'em in the ass [and] especially in terms of a live concert where the main element is visual. People go to *see* their favorite acts, not hear them…. The best responses we get from an audience is when we do our worst material…. I think most of the members of the group are very optimistic that everyone hears them and adores what they do onstage. I can't take that point of view…. I've talked to them (the audience) and I know how dumb they are. It's pathetic.[11]

Zappa's prodigious output continued with two solo albums *Hot Rats* (1969) and *Chunga's Revenge* (1970) interspersed with the release of two posthumous Mothers albums *Burnt Weeny Sandwich* and *Weasels Ripped My Flesh* (both 1970). However, while Zappa viewed the four albums in the "No Commercial Potential" cycle as made up of interchangeable musical raw material, each album was built around a specific thematic concern and cohered as interrelated documents of Zappa's musical career (influences on *Lumpy Gravy*, counterculture on *Money*, doo-wop on *Ruben*, and the Mothers on *Uncle Meat*). The flurry of releases from 1969–70 were simply made up of exchangeable new and backlogged music across the four albums. For example, an instrumental cover version of Little Richard's "Directly from My Heart to You" was an outtake from the *Hot Rats* sessions but released on *Weasels* if for no other reason than it was available as needed to fill out a double album.

Indeed, Zappa was cranking out albums at a phenomenal rate around the Project/Object method. From 1966 to 1970 the Mothers and/or Zappa released *ten* albums in four years and *thirteen* albums if one includes the compilation *Mothermania* and counts the double albums *Freak Out!* and *Uncle Meat* as two albums. However, Zappa's merging of numerous musical genres was manifest in two dominant formats that began to betray an increasing sameness. One was the highly complex instrumental that could veer between compelling avant-rock and the meander of jazz-rock

fusion. The other was the parodic rock song which increasingly emphasized raunchy sex lyrics over social commentary (on *Chunga's Revenge* most of the songs were "sex songs" rather than "love songs"). In this regard, an example of the former was "Peaches en Regalia" (*Hot Rats*) and the latter "My Guitar Wants to Kill Your Mama" (*Weasels*).

*Hot Rats* was recorded with session musicians and Ian Underwood playing a plethora of keyboards and woodwinds (the only former Mother who appeared on the album and, not coincidentally, one of the most accomplished musicians from the band). While *Hot Rats* moved into even more complex musical composition and technically demanding performance augmented by studio editing, the use of highly experienced session musicians gave the songs a much more polished feel than the frequent raggedness of the original Mothers' more *outré* endeavors. It was also a predominantly instrumental album, with Zappa honing his modern classical-jazz-rock (-etc.) hybrid style on instrumentals like "Son of Mr. Green Jeans" and "The Gumbo Variations." If Zappa had little use for lyrics beyond an occasional requirement to satisfy popular music consumers—he once remarked that "the lyrics wouldn't exist at all if it weren't for the fact that we live in a society where instrumental music is irrelevant"[12]—the only song with lyrics was "Willie the Pimp" and featured guest vocals by Captain Beefheart and here one could argue that Beefheart's appearance on *Hot Rats* was a means to promote the concurrent *Trout Mask Replica*, although listeners expecting comical but straightforward blues-rock on *TMR* would be in for quite a shock. A 4/4 blues-hard rock parody dominated by a two-bar riff with half-time drumming, "Willie the Pimp" manifested the overall problem for Zappa and the subversive social commentary: one can hear the song sustaining as much as satirizing crude racial and gender stereotypes. Moreover, the vocals only appear in the first two minutes of the song with the remaining seven minutes featuring extended soloing by Don "Sugarcane" Harris on electric violin and Zappa on guitar.

The opening song of *Hot Rats*, "Peaches en Regalia" was also released as the single and not only became one of Zappa's better-known songs but a trademark example of the Zappa instrumental song. While not a hit, it was a Zappa concert fixture for decades, having been performed by the Mothers

live as early as 1968 and part of Zappa's concert set well into the 1980s. An overall satire of marches and processional music, specifically Sir Edward Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance Military Marches* ("March No. 1" being a staple of school graduation ceremonies), "Peaches" is entirely performed by Zappa and Underwood save for the rhythm section of two R&B veterans, Shuggie Otis (bass) and Ron Selico (drums). They provide a half-time, jazz-funk groove in 4/4 throughout the song, serving as the rhythmic anchor for the various parts. More specifically, "Peaches" serves as a showcase for Underwood and several styles of music juxtaposed in quick succession over the duration of "Peaches" (total time: 3:38). The introduction is a descending riff played on effects treated keyboard to replicate a marimba sound accompanied by majestic piano flourishes. The main theme sounds like a much busier and comical parody of the famous main theme of Elgar's "March No. 1" (a.k.a. "Pomp and Circumstance") and played as keyboard/guitar duet with the instruments treated to have a percussive, harpsichord sound. This jarringly changes to a big band parody with saxophones playing in unison but in dissonant tone combinations that, coupled with the effects on the horns, gives new meaning to the term sour notes. This is soon followed by a section of pop-jazz with a requisite squiggly synthesizer solo that became as staple of 1970s fusion. Next is a complex, neo-classical organ solo of rapid-fire arpeggios that can be compared to the emerging progressive rock style and namely Keith Emerson's hybrid of pre–20th century classical, jazz, and rock idioms with the Nice. A saxophone jazz fanfare follows and then a choppy interlude featuring a cartoonish, trumpet-sound synthesizer before the song reprises the introduction and the main theme, which is repeated several times as the song fades out.[13] The issue becomes whether the eclecticism of "Peaches" functions as pastiche and an impressive demonstration of cultural literacy and musical ability, or if its montage of musical styles are individually satirized to form a collected parody.

As far as Zappa's vocal songs, the first single released from *Weasels* was "My Guitar Wants to Kill Your Mama" (the single was a slightly shorter version and to avoid potential controversy retitled "My Guitar" on the single release although the album version of the song is the one discussed). The typically lewd lyrics to "My Guitar"—replete with double entendre and sexual innuendo—detail the plight of a sexually frustrated rock musician

who is barred from his girlfriend's house by her parents, although as the title indicates her *mother* bears the brunt of the lyrical assault. Sarcastically half-sung/half-spoken by Zappa, "My Guitar" uses a half-time blues/hard rock framework with R&B/jazz horn punctuations and a monotonal electric piano pulse. The otherwise musically accessible verse-chorus is abruptly interrupted by a bridge of atonal woodwind soloing with the final minute a virtuoso guitar solo by Zappa over the main riff as the sound fades out.

On one hand, the song functions as a parody of cock rock songs, a send-up of the rock musician whose sexual liberation is thwarted by sexually repressed and repressive authority figures of square parents. His desire to exact revenge of the woman's mother with his phallic instrument culminates with the obligatory guitar solo as a masturbatory release in lieu of sex. However, the song can also be interpreted yet another sardonic response to the Beatles, in this case George Harrison's "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" (*The White Album*). The Beatles' song was a melancholy psychedelic-rock ballad about a man's unrequited love for a woman with mournful guitar solos provided by Eric Clapton, ending with the repetition of a bending, single note to signify a final collapsing into subdued sobbing. A subversive if unintended aspect of the song was the representation of the electric guitar. An instrumented coded as masculine to an overdetermined degree in rock culture, in Harrison's song electric guitar is rendered feminine and an instrument producing teardrops rather than volleys of guitar solo semen. Given Zappa's own belief in the mythic Repressive Hypothesis—the monolithic struggle of sexual liberation against forces of social repression—"My Guitar" becomes a revenge fantasy with the guitar assuming its traditional role in rock ideology as a signifier of masculine power and even violent retribution against women, namely the mother denying the male rock musician the opportunity to have a sexual encounter with the daughter.

### *Takin' Care of Business: Zappa and Bizarre Productions*

Questions of parody vs. pastiche and the ambiguities of satire are both central in criticism of Zappa's work. However, before providing a final

assessment of Zappa's musical-political project, it is necessary to consider his role as a record executive as well as a composer and musician. In 1967, MGM/Verve missed the deadline to exercise their contract option with the Mothers of Invention. With the relationship between Zappa and Verve deteriorating amid the numerous creative control disputes that reached a head over *Money*, Zappa and his business manager Herb Cohen used the contract situation to form Bizarre Productions, a company that included Bizarre Records, Straight Records, Third Story Music, and NT&B (Nifty, Bitchin' & Tough). This arrangement allowed Zappa to release avant-rock albums (through Bizarre), more commercial albums by other artists (through Straight), maintain control of all publishing rights (through Third Story), and do the cover art and advertising (through NT&B; one NT&B strategy was full page adverts in Marvel Comics, in which readers—especially tweens and teens—could order Mothers albums by direct mail). Unlike the Beatles and Apple Corps' business plan—or complete lack thereof—as a Western communism that would unconditionally bankroll numerous artistic projects, Bizarre Productions was expressly designed to guarantee Zappa creative and, as important, financial control over all aspects of his and other performer's recordings with Zappa taking the bulk of the money generated by Bizarre Productions.

Zappa released two Mothers of Invention albums through Bizarre/Verve on condition it would definitively end his relationship with the label. One was the aforementioned *Ruben & the Jets* and here one suspects *Ruben*'s concept of a doo-wop parody album—up to recycling four songs from *Freak Out!*—was motivated by Zappa's need to fulfill contractual obligations and provide throwaway music to a record label he was in the process of leaving on less than amicable terms. Not unrelated, the other was *Mothermania*, a compilation of selected tracks from the first three Mothers' albums personally edited and remixed by Zappa. After moving to Warner Bros., other than Zappa and/or Mothers recordings the only albums released on Bizarre were two double albums: a posthumous Lenny Bruce release (*The Berkeley Concert*, 1969; recorded 1965) and a Zappa-produced collection of songs, mostly a cappella, by schizophrenic street performer Wild Man Fischer (*An Evening with Wild Man Fischer*, 1968).[14] Barry Miles recounted, "The distribution deal meant that Warners had to pay Zappa each time he delivered some product, but some people at Warners

though he was abusing the terms of the agreement by coming up with any old thing to release…. [Fischer's album] was one of the worst-selling albums Warners ever had."[15] The album cover, a photo of a disheveled Fischer staring at the camera with a crazed leer standing next to an elderly woman in a rundown apartment room, probably did not boost sales. While Zappa was accused of exploiting the mentally ill Fischer in a manner that was even worse than the routine exploitation of musicians by record companies, David Wragg noted that Fischer's record was itself part of Zappa's Project/Object as far as an ongoing critique of mass culture:

> As a comment on the culture industry's ability to market just about anything, provided it looks like making a profit, Zappa scores a direct hit…. If the manufacture and exploitation of consumption is the currency of the music business, Fischer's critical potential served only as a demonstration, via Zappa's "ethnography," of its immediate commodification. If Fischer is a sign of the music business, he also signified Zappa's knowing complicity in the process of artistic exploitation—a sure demonstration of an avant-garde dilemma.[16]

An agreement was soon in place so Warner Bros. had right of first refusal on Zappa's Bizarre productions and anything Warners passed on could then be released on Straight Records. Bizarre effectively became the home label for Zappa/Mothers albums while Straight became the label for all the acts signed by Zappa. Some Straight releases were relatively commercial. Alice Cooper's *Pretties for You* (1969) and *Easy Action* (1970) were fairly standard psychedelic/hard rock although Cooper's formative "shock rock" stage show involving cross-dressing and *Grand Guignol* theatrical violence was another matter.[17] The Persuasions' *Acapella* (1970) was a self-explanatory album of doo-wop/gospel music by a singing group that auditioned for Zappa over the phone from a record store in New Jersey. Other Straight releases from 1969 and 1970 were much more esoteric fare. Tim Buckley's *Blue Afternoon* (1969), *Lorca* (1970), and *Starsailor* (1970) assembled folk, soul, and free jazz with increasingly avant-garde results (in particular *Starsailor*). An acronym for "Girls Together Outrageously" as well as a satirical reference to the Pontiac GTO, a popular brand of muscle car in the late 1960s, the GTOs' *Permanent Damage* (1969) was a Zappa-produced album featuring well-known Los Angeles groupies. Songs ranged

from 1960s girl group send-ups ("I'm in Love with the Ooh-Ooh Man") and psychedelic parodies ("The Eureka Springs Garbage Lady") to dialog tracks such as the self-explanatory "Miss Pamela and Miss Sparky discuss STUFFED BRAS and some of their early gym class experiences." "Rodney" featured well-known Los Angeles scene-maker Rodney Binginheimer bragging about how much sex he got thanks to his rock star connections while the GTOs added cheerleader-style vocal interjections. In this respect, given that sexism—satirical or not—was also part of the Project/Object in the recurring use of the stock character Suzy Creamcheese and numerous lyrics, the GTOs became a feminist counter-response.

## *Call of the Wild: Zappa, Captain Beefheart and* Trout Mask Replica *(1969)*

While David Wragg pointed out that Zappa used of his record labels as part of an ongoing critique of mass culture within his Project/Object method, it could also be said, perhaps more charitably, that Zappa also used his industry position to release what were otherwise unreleasable albums. One was Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band's *Trout Mask Replica*, a landmark in avant-rock produced by Zappa and originally released on Straight Records. To provide some background, Don Van Vliet and Zappa were high school friends and Van Vliet was also the lead singer of the Soots, Zappa's rock band whose demos were rejected by Dot Records for lacking commercial potential. Around this time, Zappa came up with Van Vliet's stage name Captain Beefheart, which was intended as a spoof of superhero monikers (i.e. Captain America, Captain Marvel) with "beef heart" a crude in-joke meaning the head of the penis.

Between 1966–9, Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band recorded the two singles for A&M and the albums *Safe as Milk* (Buddah, 1967) and *Strictly Personal* (Blue Thumb, 1968), records which Beefheart's "avant-blues" sound was evolving and his singing "compared to Howlin' Wolf and several species of primordial beasts."[18] This era also demonstrated Beefheart's rocky relationship with record companies.[19] Buddah's initial commercial successes were bubblegum pop singles (e.g., the Ohio Express' "Yummy

Yummy Yummy," 1910 Fruitgum Company's "Simon Says" and "1, 2, 3, Red Light"). This brand identity did not bode well for a band merging blues with free jazz influences and surrealist lyrics; Buddah rejected the band's proposed follow-up, a double album titled *It Comes to You in a Brown Paper Wrapper*.[20] *Strictly Personal* was produced by Bob Krasnow, also the owner of Blue Thumb Records, who added extensive phase-shifting and other studio effects to the final mix that Beefheart condemned as "psychedelic bromo seltzer."[21]

With the band and Blue Thumb at odds, Frank Zappa offered Beefheart a record contract through the newly formed Bizarre Productions guaranteeing Beefheart complete creative control. A round of personnel changes ensued, with John French (drums) and Jeff Cotton (guitar) remaining members of the Magic Band joined by Bill Harkleroad (guitar), Mark Boston (bass), and Beefheart's cousin Victor Hayden (bass clarinet). All the musicians were given comically absurd stage names: Drumbo (French), Antennae Jimmy Semens (Cotton), Zoot Horn Rollo (Harkleroad), Rockette Morton (Boston), and the Mascara Snake (Hayden). Beefheart also began augmenting the sound with free saxophone solos rather than conventional blues harmonica and the Magic Band embarked on radically reinterpreting the blues along the lines of Ornette Coleman's "harmolodic" theory of free jazz: "Harmony, melody, speed, and rhythm, time and phrases all have equal position, in the results that come from the placing and spacing of ideas."[22]

Coleman's harmolodic theory can also be described as constructing a horizontal structure of musical organization placing melody, harmony, and rhythm on a level plane rather than a vertical hierarchy of melody over harmony over rhythm. "Noise" possibilities are increased by eliminating the constraints of tonality and recognizable time signatures. In this respect, Anton Ehernzwing discussed the affinity for avant-garde music and abstract painting:

> Paul Klee himself makes the link between painting and music. He calls this dispersed attention that calls attention to the entire picture plane "multi-dimensional" … and also "polyphonic" … polyphonic listening also overcomes the conscious division between figure and sound….

> Unlike the visual artists, among whom only Klee appreciated the problem, musicians have coined terms for the two types of hearing. The normal focused type of attention can only appreciate the loose polyphonic structures as solid harmonic chords progressing … below the dominant melody line above. As chords are written out vertically in musical notation, this solid kind of hearing is called vertical. The second more scattered approach is called horizontal [listening]…. Attention keeps shifting between a sonorous melody supported by solid vertical chords and the weightless transparency of polyphonic counterpoint. Single dissonant tones may resist being sucked into the vertical sound.[23]

While *Trout Mask Replica* could be simplistically described as a "free blues" album, it is not the freedom of improvisation over composition but the freedom from tonality and steady meter afforded by harmolodic theory as "horizontal music" that demands "horizontal listening." To reconfigure Ehernzwing's terms, on *TMR* there is a solid polyphonic foundation with a weightless transparency of vertical chords. Put differently, it is not so much that blues becomes infused with arrhythmic dissonance and noise. Amid the dissonance, noise, and polyrhythms melodies, time signatures and blues riffs drift in and out of the songs.

The myths constructed around *TMR* include that Beefheart wrote all the songs on piano in anywhere from eight hours to eight days, he taught the band the songs and even how to play their instruments, and/or much of the album was improvised as free music around the compositions. While Beefheart wrote the basic elements of the songs by whistling, humming, or banging on a piano, French became the Magic Band's musical director and Harkleroad's recollections bear quoting at length:

> [French] would show us the parts…. He had tremendous control over who played what, Don didn't know what we were playing. As [Beefheart] heard us rehearsing the songs—and he rarely was at rehearsals—he would become familiar with the parts we were working out, and he might say, "That's great," or "You need to fix that." But we'd play in different time signatures and make it work together—how we would come together after twelve beats and then move on to the

> next section—wasn't determined by Don…. The lyric was unto itself and the music was unto itself, and they were crammed together, sometimes magically and sometimes not so well…. There was never any rehearsing of the lyrics, so they were very separate … [Beefheart] adopted the mentality of a sculptor … to use sound, bodies, and people as tools. It was increasingly clear that our job as his band was to turn it into sounds that were repeatable.[24]

During the construction of *TMR*, Beefheart's already autocratic control of the band became menacing. Beyond a punishing work schedule—the Magic Band spent 12–14 hours every day for several months rigorously arraigning and practicing the songs from *TMR* while living in a squalid house and abject poverty—Beefheart used tactics like sleep and food deprivation while band meetings called by Beefheart often consisted of singling out a band member and subjecting him to verbal and sometimes physical abuse by the rest of the group. Hence, the music was exhaustively (pun indented) rehearsed despite the seemingly chaotic, free-form interplay. Zappa recounted that the Magic Band "did all the tracks in five hours, and that's doings several takes. I couldn't tell the difference between the takes."[25] Indeed, it was the relentless precision within the seeming cacophony that made *TMR* so compelling and disturbing. In a 1974 *New Musical Express* article on *TMR*, avant-rock legend Fred Frith noted, "It is always alarming to hear people playing together and yet not in any recognizable rhythmic pattern. This is not free music, it is completely controlled, and one of the reasons it's remarkable [is] forces that … emerge in improvisation are harnessed and made constant, repeatable."[26] Indeed, *TMR* was arguably one of the first "math rock" albums as far as the construction of extraordinarily complex songs around interlocking parts that do not necessarily "fit" with each other as far as key signatures, time signatures, or the same tempo.

While producer and owner of the record label, Zappa could have exerted a considerable degree of control over *TMR*, but largely deferred to Beefheart over much of the album. Some criticisms have also been raised, including members of the Magic Band, around Zappa's lack of production work given the extensive studio composition that became something of a Zappa/Mothers trademark. Harkleroad recalled, "[Engineer] Dick Kunc … would go 'Okay' and we would go … twenty-one tunes later we were

done…. Frank was just sitting there. He didn't really produce the album. There was no musical input, nothing."[27] However, a case can be made that Zappa did produce *TMR* and where he did provide input it did not necessarily benefit *TMR* as a whole. The Magic Band as a performing unit was so rigorously rehearsed they could play the extremely complicated yet ostensibly free songs repeatedly without deviation to the point any musical input by Zappa was superfluous. Moreover, Zappa's production role can also be defined as the production role Andy Warhol is credited with on *The Velvet Underground and Nico* (discussed next chapter). Rather than producing as far as actively working with the material, shaping it and sometimes drastically altering the songs (e.g., Phil Spector's work on *Let It Be*), a case where the record producer assumes a role analogous to a film or theatrical director in the recording studio, on *TMR* Zappa was producer in the sense of a film or theatrical producer, providing the capital to make the album and a means to distribute the completed album through Straight Records.

Where Zappa did provide input was in some studio composition and post-production; he managed to include some of his own stylistic touches as well. "The Blimp (mousetrapreplica)" was an agitated recitation of a Beefheart poem by Jeff Cotton that Zappa recorded over the phone at his studio and then set to a 7/4 riff culled from "Charles Ives," a then-unreleased Mothers song. Given the title and Cotton's frantic oration, and while it may or may not be intended, "The Blimp" can be heard as a macabre, surreal parody of the Hindenburg disaster and Herbert Morrison's anguished on-air account. Zappa also encouraged "dialog tracks" along the lines of his own albums. While some came from found sources, they were mostly bits of nonsensical banter, some done as monologs and as some short exchanges between band members. It is these segments that become the last effective moments of *TMR*, in that they push *TMR* into the realm of forced absurdism as opposed to the musical and lyrical surrealism of the songs.

Zappa's initial plan was to record *TMR* at the band's rehearsal house with a mobile studio set-up as an "anthropological field recording."[28] Indeed, given *TMR*'s lyrical emphasis on the return to nature as the only antidote to the modern world, the idea of doing the album as a kind of field recording

became a part of the conceptual element. One immediate issue was that after neighborhood noise complaints and the threat of police intervention during the months of rehearsal, French applied cardboard on the drum heads and cymbals to muffle the sound. By the time of the actual recording, the clomping drums and deadened cymbals were integral to the band's sound; although he had trepidations, Zappa decided to record the cardboard-covered drums. Nonetheless, despite the initial success of home field recording after a couple of days Beefheart demanded *TMR* be recorded in an actual studio and accused Zappa of trying to save money at his artistic expense. Zappa relented and subsequently booked Whitney Studios in Glendale, recording the basic tracks of *TMR* in five hours. Another problem arose when, once the basic tracks were completed, Beefheart refused to wear headphones when he sang the final vocal takes (and, presumably, played the saxophone solos), only listening to the audio bleed-through of the songs playing from the studio control room. As Zappa put it, "The chances of [Beefheart] staying in synch were nil—but that's how the vocals were done."[29]

Rather than discussing each song on *TMR*, the focus is on the first three songs—"Frownland," "The Dust Blows Forward 'N' the Dust Blows Back," and "Dachau Blues"—and the last three songs: "Steal Softly Through Snow," "Old Fart at Play," and "Veterans' Day Poppy." Kevin Courrier cogently described the opening moments of *TMR* in which "'Frownland' kicks off the record in 7/8 time, until the guitar notes start to fall away aimlessly, and French's drums begin to resemble falling rocks."[30] Over the musical chaos, Beefheart emphatically proclaims his refusal to return to a "frownland" of modern society of materialism and self-interest while he extols the natural world as the only true terrain of liberation. However, this was not simply counterculture "back to nature" romanticism. As Langdon Winner suggested, "The land he asks us to visit is one we already know…. It is *not* ... outer space or the realm of late 1960s hippie, psychedelic weirdness…. To accompany Captain Beefheart on this journey is to re-experience the nature and artifice of the American continent through a vast project of surrealist reclamation."[31] Likewise, Greil Marcus observed, "As with the painter Henri Rousseau, with whom Beefheart may have more in common with than any rock 'n' roller, the surreal reveals the prosaic, the prosaic reveals the surreal."[32]

While rock has frequently been defined as a "primitive music" as far as its melodic and rhythmic simplicity, the music of *TMR* sought to represent the sounds of nature, not unlike Oliver Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (*Bird Catalogue*, 1956–8) in which Messiaen transcribed the calls of various birds and converted them into piano pieces, leaving their dissonances and arrhythmia intact. In an interview with Lester Bangs, Beefheart noted the avant-garde jazz of Eric Dolphy "moved me, but he didn't move me as much as a goose … the way they blow their hearts out for nothing like that."[33] Indeed, listening to Beefheart's horn solos on *TMR* they become reminiscent of wild animal calls and his vocals manifest a guttural collection of groans and shouts where meaning is conveyed by the primordial expressions of the voice as much as the surreal lyrics replete with references to earth, sky, water, and animals—be they real, extinct, or anamorphic.

The ecstatic ferocity of "Frownland" is followed by "The Dust Blows Forward 'N' the Dust Blows Back." "Dust" is one of three a cappella songs on *TMR*, the others being the field holler "Well" and the sea shanty "Orange Claw Hammer." Moreover, these a cappella songs sound like improvised stream-of-consciousness recordings. At several points there are awkward pauses and meter lapses where Beefheart sounds like he is generating the lyrics on the spot; on "Dust" and "OCH" Beefheart noticeably stumbles over words and starts verses over. Sung in a vaudeville style, "Dust" was recorded on a cassette recorder at transferred to the master tape, resulting in a tinny sound as if it was emanating from a Victrola and the sound of the cassette recorder being clicked on and off while Beefheart presumably thought of the next verse replicates the sound of an old scratchy record. In that the a cappella singing also draws greater attention to the lyrics, the imagery of campfires, riverboats, and wanderlust owes as much to Mark Twain and Walt Whitman as the surrealist poems of Guillaume Apollinaire or Robert Desnos. Winner suggested

> The images of the song are those of a pleasant, unromanticized American landscape described in the motley vernacular of old time rural culture. Its lyrics reshuffle a set of experiences and expressions from everyday American life to sketch comic portraits in miniature. While the specific references to places, times, characters,

> colloquialisms, and material artifacts change throughout the album and while dark themes often intrude upon the comedy, Beefheart's approach … begins with elements that are ridiculously familiar to everyone and plays with them until he produced extraordinary, unsettling effects.[34]

"Dust" shockingly cuts to "Dachau Blues," one of *TMR*'s most overtly political song and most harrowing track as well, its grim subject matter standing out amid the overall comical leanings of the album. Beefheart's vocals alternately moan and howl as he describes the mass murders in the concentration camps and evokes the potential mass murder of World War III and a nuclear holocaust. The song lurches with a mechanistic yet free-flowing momentum, the guitars dissonantly grinding against each other while French's drums suggest the rhythmic noises of trampling feet as well as factory assembly lines. Midway through, the bass clarinet enters with an array of atonal shrieking runs.[35] While the band replicates the operations of a concentration camp, the bass clarinet represents the screams of a prisoner. As a frightening coda to "Dachau Blues," there is a monolog derived from a found source. An elderly neighbor at the rehearsal house one day was surreptitiously recorded describing how he once solved a rat infestation problem: with sticks and shotguns.

While "Dachau Blues" is a disturbing representation of the Holocaust (past) and specter of nuclear war (future) recorded in the political crisis point of 1969 (present), Paul Hegarty suggested the song is something of an anomaly on *TMR* and functions as a specific point of gratuitous shock. "However challenging the album is as a whole, elsewhere the humour is swampy, genital, anal. Its music is consistently disjointed, jerky, scratchy, but it needs the inappropriateness of Dachau as dada or Surrealist material for comic avant-gardism."[36] Implicit in Hegarty's critique is that much of *TMR* ultimately partakes in the vulgarity and sexism of Zappa's work, albeit concealed in the surreal wordplay of puns and *non sequiturs*. While this critique has validity (e.g., the sexual imagery of *TMR* songs like "Hair Pie: Bake 1, "Hair Pie: Bake 2," "Neon Meat Dream of an Ocatfish," "Pena," "She's Too Much for My Mirror," or "When Big Joan Sets Up"), Hegarty perhaps minimizes the importance of "Dachau Blues" in that it becomes a clear statement on the disaster of modernity. "Frownland" begins *TMR* with

a declaration of independence while “Dust” follows as an ode to anachronistic frontier freedom. “Dachau Blues” becomes the abrupt reminder of what modernity has wrought.

The last three songs on *TMR* perform a similar yet different function. Even by *TMR*’s rigorous math-rock standards, “Steal Softly Through Snow” is one of the album’s most densely complicated songs. As well as the pervasive dissonance, “Snow” typified the Magic Band’s playing in shifting combinations of various time signatures and not all at once. French noted, “I knew I wasn’t going to be able to play in three time signatures at the same time…. I wanted to … make a part that would suggest tying them together—even though it was going to be a counter rhythm, just like everything else” while Harkleroad simply recounted, “I remember torturing myself trying to learn the thing.”[37] Lyrically, Beefheart’s protestations are expressed as a longing for a migratory freedom than cannot be fully achieved. Mike Barnes observed the song “touches upon some of the same themes [of *TMR*], this time more poignantly. Van Vliet is heartbroken by seeing geese flying off for winter. He is left behind to witness highways being built over fields of grain, and with only murderous humanity for company.”[38]

On *TMR*’s penultimate song “Old Fart at Play,” the shifting dissonances and polyrhythms underscore a recitation by Beefheart although the music abruptly stops midway through and Beefheart completes the recitation unaccompanied by the band. In fact, “Old Fart” was originally titled “My Business is the Truth, Your Business is a Lie” and Zappa—who felt the song was personally directed at him—adamantly insisted Beefheart change the lyrics. “Old Fart” was a poem that Beefheart had in his stockpile and read in place of the original lyrics.[39] In “Old Fart” the titular character puts on the mysterious trout mask and Courrier argued it “is a disguise that reveals, rather than hides … a place where freedom is experienced rather than consciously defined.”[40] However, in the final seconds the song cuts to Beefheart finishing the recitation of “Old Fart” in a knowingly affected voice that is much less audible and with a much different sound. Beefheart completes the reading and then Jeff Cotton mummers a sardonic comment about the profundity of the poem. The final bit of recitation was edited from a test recording done at the house in the initial field recording sessions and

tacked-on to the studio version, presumably by Zappa. Here the recitation turns on itself, it undercuts the surreal solemnity by ending with a send-up of the song lyrics as obscure and pompous rather than a series of comical but evocative musings.

Courrier argued "Old Fart at Play" represents *TMR*'s actual conclusion—or at least or more fitting one—than the final track "Veteran's Day Poppy." This reading stems from constructing a conceptual teleology where "Frownland" is the initial emphatic call for freedom in the natural world and "Old Fart at Play" is the finale where humanity and nature reach a surreal synthesis in a utopian moment, although the final moment of the recitation seems to sabotage such lofty sentiments. In examining the first three songs on *TMR* there is a call for natural liberation ("Frownland"), an idealized ode to frontier freedom through arcane images ("Dust"), and a shocking shift to modern historical catastrophe ("Dachau Blues"). On the last three songs on *TMR*, there is a resignation that natural liberation is all but impossible in the modern world ("Snow"), an ironic appraisal of transformative freedom through absurd images ("Old Fart at Play"), and another disconcerting unsettling shift to a modern world at war ("VDP"). To this extent, *TMR* does not end with the realization of the imaginary, the utopian longings announced by "Frownland" and ultimately if ostensibly achieved with "Old Fart at Play." Rather, "VDP" jolts listener back to the real, the present disaster of modernity manifest by war and mass death.

One reason that "VDP" sounds incongruent it was one of two songs on *TMR* recorded in August 1968 in a different studio with Gary "Magic" Marker on bass (the other being "Moonlight on Vermont"). Both songs have a slightly different sounding mix and both of these songs contain more discernible traces of melody and time signature than the rest of the songs on *TMR*, although there is still an ample amount of dissonance as far as the guitars. One could say the song is somewhere between the more accessible avant-blues of *Safe as Milk* and the bulk of *TMR*. Despite Beefheart's penchant for lyrical absurdity and obscurity, "VDP" is a fairly despondent and overtly anti-war song which inevitably becomes a commentary on Vietnam. The song begins with a tangle of distorted, dissonant, blues-derived guitar parts while the polyrhythmic drumming is propelled by a steady click of eight notes on cowbell. The entire vocal occurs within the

first minute of "VDP" and at 1:05 the song noticeably speeds up and French plays a straight backbeat (!) while the guitars engage in clashing solos. At 1:52 the song shifts into a slower section built on a repeated guitar riff that provokes a sense of recurring melancholy through its dissonance which continues until the song ends at 4:31. Despite the abundance of surrealist back to nature images throughout the album, the final image constructed in "VDP" is one that uncomfortably places the listener in the present moment of history: a man silently mourning beside the grave of his son as a casualty of war.

John R. Lane noted "In the philosophical tradition of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he is critical of the current, corrupted, state of society…. Van Vliet advocates embracing nature and relocating man in a position that stems from natural order rather than an imposed hierarchy."[41] Ultimately, *TMR* as a valorization of nature and a vilification of modernity is both utopian and fatalistic. The function of dissonance and noise becomes two-fold and *both* represent nature and modernity as necessarily related cacophonies: liberation in the natural world of howling animals and ecological fury compared to a modern world of war, genocide, and industrial capitalism. The relocation that Beefheart posits from the administered life in modern society to the nomadic life in nature requires a nomadic music that reject a musical territorialization into the imposed hierarchies of melody, harmony, and stable meter. The contradiction of *TMR* was that the ostensibly "free music" and the lyrical messages of natural freedom were the product of totalitarian conditions of production and performance.

### *Zappa and Adorno: "On the Social Situation of Music"*

As suggested, the problem of reducing Zappa's politics to the lyrical content is the pervasive role of satire which, in effect, allows listeners to interpret Zappa for their own purposes by picking and choosing which songs where the views expressed are literal and which ones are ironic. Despite Zappa's avant-gardist approach, there was also a degree of conservatism in his music as far as the role of dissonance. Zappa contended,

"Dissonance when it is unresolved is like having a headache for life…. The most interesting music … is music in which dissonance is created, sustained for the proper amount of time, and resolved…. Same thing with words."[42] The resolution of dissonance itself becomes a political gesture, as Paul Hegarty noted in discussing 1970s progressive rock, a genre in which Zappa is sometimes categorized.[43] Hegarty argued a band like King Crimson often unleashed dissonance and noise that remained unresolved as a continual tension with a musical framework whereas Yes, like Zappa, often used dissonance and noise as tension-release which was resolved within musical constructs; in doing so, "From a class analysis perspective…. Yes can never offer a critique, as formally this sense of completion hides alienation (both personal and economic),with the promise of solutions from within (the individual, current society). In fact, their gestures towards dissonance would emphasize this complicity."[44]

In this context, critics such as Ben Watson and David Wragg have productively analyzed Zappa around Theodor W. Adorno's work on music, mass culture, and the culture industry.[45] In assessing Zappa's music, one can utilize Adorno's essay "On the Social Situation of Music" (1932) and what he termed "music of alienation" represented by Arnold Schoenberg, "objectivist music" represented by Igor Stravinsky, and "surrealist music" represented by Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht. Schoenberg's 12-tone music was "music of alienation" and the inevitable moments of dissonance served as critique of capitalism: the negation of tonality as a representation of bourgeois ideology, with individual musical notes representing "social atoms" being organized into a harmonious, rhythmic whole (i.e., chords and meter) as a metaphor of liberal-democratic order. Music of alienation "resembles the monad of Leibniz; it 'represents' to be sure, not as a pre-established harmony but … historically produced dissonance, namely social antinomies. This first type … the only music which offers a serious shock to the listener, is represented essentially by Arnold Schoenberg and his school."[46] In contrast, Adorno provided a harsh critique of Stravinsky's music of "objectivism":

> The second type includes music which recognizes the fact of alienation as its own isolation and as "individualism"…. It would achieve this through recourse to stylistic forms the past, which it views as immune

> to alienation…. Stravinsky and his followers forms an exact antithesis to…. Schoenberg and his school; here the game is opposed to the absence of illusion; the seductively arbitrary change of masks, whose wearers are consequently identical but empty…. In every objectivist music the attempt is made to correct the alienation from within, that is to say without any clear view of social reality.[47]

To be sure, there are considerable elements of dissonance and noise in Zappa's music, and the function of dissonance as a signifier of social disharmony and critique of modern society is different than Captain Beefheart's *Trout Mask Replica* where continually unresolved and often overpowering dissonance serves a dual purpose: one, signifying a utopian longing and liberation as the noise of the primordial, natural world; second, signifying the disasters of modernity as the noise of war and genocide. With Zappa, the dissonance—musical and lyrical—becomes comical counterpoint as much as disconcerting commentary; moreover, dissonance is not only resolved but superseded in the rampant eclecticism as "the seductively arbitrary change of masks … the attempt to correct the alienation from within." It was not coincidental that Stravinsky was one of Zappa's primary modern classical influences, particularly the referential/self-referential quotations that become part and parcel of postmodernism and the blank parody of pastiche. However, Michel Delville argued that one consistent aspect of Zappa's eclecticism and maximalism was a categorical rejection of *any* neutrality towards the source materials and that the seeming pastiches were always and acerbically parodic—thereby transcending pastiche in the process.[48] Put another way, there was always a mocking overtness in the music, lyrics, and the performance that left little doubt to Zappa's satirical intentions, although the satirical effectiveness could be quite another matter.

In certain respects, it is not so much Dada but Brecht that offers comparison to Zappa, although in a 1967 *Jazz & Pop* interview Zappa noted any similarities to Brecht were purely coincidental and Zappa would have had little truck with Brecht's Marxism. "I'm not a Brecht fan because I don't know that much about what he does; but people keep saying that so maybe it's true. I've read hardly any of his stuff. I've heard *The Threepenny Opera* —like half of it one time—couldn't sit through the rest."[49] Analyzing the

operas of Weill/Brecht (i.e., *The Threepenny Opera, Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*), Adorno suggested a third form as "hybrid music" or "surrealistic music" between music of alienation and objectivist music.

> Hand in hand with objectivism, this composer proceeds from the cognition of alienation…. He denies himself the positive solution and contents himself with permitting social flaws to manifest themselves … "use" music in the distorting mirror of his artistic method, thus revealing it to be a commodity…. It is a style based on montage … and moves together rubble and fragment or constructs actual compositions out of falsehood and illusion…. The shock … overexposes common compositional means … expresses alarm about the possibility about the society within which they have their origin and, at the same time, it is a living negation of a positive communal music, which collapses into the laughter of devilish vulgar music.[50]

To be sure, Adorno's definition of surrealistic music, exemplified by Weill/Brecht, is one of montage between high culture (classical music, opera) and popular music (cabaret, jazz, salon music). Nonetheless, Zappa can be heard as kind of hybrid/surrealistic music as well, assembling high culture (modern classical, avant-garde/experimental) and popular music (rock, pop, doo-wop, jazz, etc.) as so much "rubble and fragment" into colliding *montages* as opposed to blended *pastiches* where not only social flaws but the commodity role of music in society was consciously revealed as product. Zappa denied the idea of rock as "positive communal music" by converting it into "the laughter of devilish vulgar music." As stressed, the problem with Zappa was this "laughter of devilish vulgar music" was steeped in the bourgeois ideology of capitalism and individualism with the resultant laughter often "the laughter of bourgeois sadism."[51]

Mass music was used as a vehicle for theoretical music in which Zappa could pursue his subversive musical experimentations and social commentary and at the same time produce marketable product. As an avant-gardist who moved into popular music by necessity as much as choice, Zappa shared the problem of other modern classical composers who utilized elements of popular music in the 1960s (e.g., Terry Riley). Simon Frith argued

> Even when rock music was treated as an art form, in the late 1960s, its listeners were more interested in content rather than form, in what it revealed about experience and feeling, rather than in how that was revealed. The few serious avant-garde composers who learned from rock … and wrote music using rock devices … were rock technicians, not rock musicians; they were too detached emotionally from the social effects of performance.[52]

Indeed, Zappa was much closer to a rock technician than rock musician, a formalist whose style was manifest in increasingly complex music requiring considerable technical skill to perform and an assumed greater intellectual capacity needed for adequate listening. If Zappa was detached emotionally from the social effects of performance it was not simply because of Zappa's notorious perfectionist demands in the studio as a composer and bandleader. For Zappa, the social effects of popular music—be it love songs or peace and love songs—were bogus and merely catered to pseudo-rebellion and pseudo-individualism: why Zappa's brand of rock theater converted the standardized rock concert into a Dada farce, why he caustically chastised the counterculture with *Money*, and why his work was infused with a pervasive ridicule musically as well as politically. Writing in 1938, Adorno could have been referring to Zappa's work three decades later: "Music has become comic … primarily because something so completely useless is carried on with all the visible signs of the strain of serious work…. Music reveals [peoples'] alienation from one another, and the consciousness of alienation vents itself in laughter…. The society which judged them comic becomes comic."[53] Again, the crucial qualifier is that for Zappa society did not become comic, but society's citizens became the continual butt of the joke.

Like Adorno, Zappa had a fundamentally pessimistic view of any oppositional potential in mass culture, specifically popular music produced within the Culture Industry as a rationalized system that negates of the oppositional potential of culture by instead supplying standardized and easily consumable cultural products which, in turn, produces intolerance for anything that does not conform to increasingly stunted tastes. However, for Adorno the central issue was cultural production, not cultural consumption. "If the masses have been unjustly reviled from above as masses, the culture

industry is not among the least responsible for making them into masses and then despising them."[54] Zappa became part of mass culture as much as he seemingly abhorred it, and part of the Culture Industry as much as he ostensibly positioned himself as outside it—or at least *above* it. Commenting on the Sex Pistols, Zappa dismissed them as "a commercial game which has been played … this has nothing to do with music. I am glad someone sneaks in there and makes a mockery of the business. But how much of a mockery is it is they wind up being sold and distributed by the same business that they intend to mock?"[55] Ultimately, Zappa's critique of the Sex Pistols' failure could be leveled against his own Project/Object as a mockery of mass culture sold and distributed by the very culture industry Zappa intended to mock.

At worst, Zappa produced a deliberately dumbed-down and increasingly redundant style of avant-rock that did not confront the listener beyond a possible, initial shock effect but instead condescended to the audience. As Robert Christgau put it in a scathing review of *Chunga's Revenge* (*The Village Voice*, 1970), "Like Bobby Sherman, Zappa is a selfish exploiter of public taste. That Bobby Sherman wants to make money while Zappa wants to make money and emulate Varèse is beside the point—if anything, Zappa's aestheticism intensified his contempt for rock and its audience." Christgau raised a critical point in relation to Zappa's brand of avant-rock. As noted, Zappa described his work as "composite, gap-filling product that fills most of the gaps between so-called serious music and so-called popular music." Yet the serious music was the end and the popular music as the means by which Zappa's aspirations as an avant-garde/experimental musician could have a financial pay-off rather than, as much as he self-promoted it, music with "no commercial potential." As far as the cultural marketplace, Walter Benjamin argued, "The Dadaists attached much less importance value to the sales value of their work that to its uselessness for contemplative immersion…. What they intended and achieved was a relentless destruction of the aura of their creations, which they branded as reproductions with the very means of production."[56] Zappa may have viewed elements of his work as having "uselessness for contemplative immersion" as far as the often vulgar and (intentionally) stupid lyrical content and song parodies; an essential tenet of Project/Object was the "reproducibility" of anything throughout his career in recycled forms.

Unlike Dadaists, Zappa attached *great* importance the sales value of his work and, in practice, he was in agreement with Andy Warhol's maxim: "Making money is art and working is art and the best art is good business." Ultimately, the Zappa brand of avant-rock was oppositional as far as it opposed mass culture while it embraced capitalist ideology as gap-filling product between mass music and theoretical music.

# Part Three

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# All Tomorrow's Parties

*The Velvet Underground*

# 11

## Andy Says

The Exploding Plastic Inevitable and *The Velvet Underground and Nico* (1967)

> In the beginning, Lou [Reed] and I had an almost religious fervor, trying to figure out ways to integrate some of La Monte Young's or [Andy] Warhol's concepts into rock and roll. But after the first album we lost our patience and diligence.[1]
>
> —John Cale

### *Opposites Attract: The Formation of the Velvet Underground*

The name of the band taken from a book about alternative sexual practices, the Velvet Underground became avant-rock pioneers through their assemblage of Lou Reed's minimalist rock ethos ("Three chords and you're into jazz"[2]) and John Cale's minimalist avant-garde background. In 1964, Lou Reed—a Syracuse graduate in English Literature who studied under Delmore Schwartz—was an aspiring singer-songwriter influenced by performers ranging from the folk of Bob Dylan, the Southern soul of Booker T. and the M.G.s, and the free jazz of Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor. While working as a staff songwriter and session musician for Pickwick Records Reed penned "The Ostrich," a satirical garage-rock song about how to do a dance called the Ostrich: someone puts their head on the floor and lets other people stomp on it. Reed and other session musicians recorded "The Ostrich" for Pickwick, which released it as a single under the name the Primitives. It sold unexpectedly well and Pickwick hastily hired

some musicians to perform with Reed as the Primitives for promotional concert appearances.

One was John Cale, a Welsh classically trained multi-instrumentalist. A graduate of Goldsmiths, University of London—where he was named "most hateful student" by the faculty—Cale came to the U.S. on a Leonard Bernstein Scholarship and studied at Tanglewood Music Center with Aaron Copland and Iannis Xenakis. Cale was also involved with the Fluxus movement and part of the "Pocket Theater Piano Relay Team" that gave a complete performance of Erik Satie's *Vexations* at New York City's Pocket Theater in September of 1963. A short piano piece with instructions it should be played 840 times in a row, *Vexations* took over 18 hours to complete using a pool of pianists.[3] (To note, John Cage co-organized the performance and set up a time clock in the lobby; for every twenty minutes spent listening, an audience member received a 5¢ refund on the $5.00 admission). At the time he contracted with Pickwick, Cale was working in minimalist music with La Monte Young in the Theater of Eternal Music. One of Young's better-known pieces, *Composition 1960 #7* consists of a B/F♯ chord with the performance instructions simply stating "To be held for a long time."[4]

While Cale joined the Primitives for some quick income, he was initially intrigued by what Reed termed "Ostrich tuning" on "The Ostrich." All the strings on Reed's guitar were tuned to octaves of A♯, a kind of minimalist method of limiting tonal variation which shared an affinity to Cale's work with La Monte Young.[5] After the Primitives ran their course, Cale was sufficiently impressed with Reed's songs like "Heroin" and "Venus in Furs"—obviously not Pickwick Records singles fare—and they decided to form a rock band. Unlike the Mothers of Invention, where Frank Zappa was the undisputed musical director and the conduit for influences ranging from the Five Satins to Edgard Varèse, Reed and Cale respectively represented popular music and serious music with the Velvets becoming the point of often tense assemblage. Moreover, there was underlying tension manifest in Reed's Americanism of rock music abandon and literary candor derived from the crime novels of Raymond Chandler as well as Beat writers like William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Hubert Selby, Jr., versus Cale's Continentialism of modern classical and avant-garde aestheticism informed

by academic training, the neo-Dada of Fluxus, and the minimalism of Young.

With Reed writing the songs and serving as the Velvets' frontman on vocals and guitar, Cale alternated between keyboards, bass, and electric viola. To compensate for tuning issues, Cale used a combination of guitar and mandolin strings on the viola that produced a highly abrasive, sawing sound when amplified yet alone distorted.[6] The Velvets line-up was rounded out by Sterling Morrison (guitar, bass), a college friend of Reed with a rock background and Angus MacLise, a percussionist who worked with Cale in the Theater of Eternal Music. MacLise immediately quit the band when they accepted their first paying gig (Summit High School, $75) and Maureen "Moe" Tucker was enlisted. An amateur drummer who was the sister of a friend of Morrison, a woman in a rock band was the exception and not the rule in the mid–1960s, and a woman playing drums as opposed to lead and/or background vocalist was unprecedented in 1965. Moreover, Tucker's "less is more" style of playing, highly influenced by the Rolling Stones' Charlie Watts, emphasized metronomic time-keeping over "flash drumming" (e.g., Ginger Baker or Keith Moon) which effectively complimented the more consciously minimalist aesthetic of Reed and Cale. Among the unorthodox techniques Tucker often employed was standing while she played, employing mallets as well as sticks, using a bass drum on its side as a kind of floor tom, limiting the use of cymbals, and occasionally substituting a tambourine for the snare.

### *The Concert of Cruelty: The Velvets, Nico and the EPI*

The Velvets' avant-garde credentials were firmly established when they began their association with Andy Warhol and the Factory in late 1965. After making an unofficial management agreement with rock journalist Al Aronowitz, he secured a residency at a coffee house called the Café Bizarre with the Velvets playing six sets a night for $20. The Velvets were fired shortly afterwards. After being told my club management the band's run would be terminated if their set continued to include "Black Angel's Death Song"—primarily made up of Cale's shifting, atonal viola arpeggios

accompanying Reed's rapid-fire, Beat poet-influenced vocal delivery—the Velvets opened with a particularly intense version of the song for their next set. Nonetheless, through various art circle recommendations Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey scouted the Velvets during their brief tenure at Café Bizarre and offered them an official management deal which, given Warhol's status, offered connections, patronage, and the likelihood of a major label record contract. In December of 1965, the Velvets' first moment of national exposure occurred when they were briefly seen and mentioned in a *CBS Evening News* report on the New York City underground film circuit.

Morrissey was candid as far as the market rationale for a Warhol/Factory venture into popular music. "Andy's connection with the Velvet Underground … made a gold mine of good fortune for him, and he became identified with rock and roll and the younger generation…. But I was hoping to make some money."[7] However, a key condition in signing on with Warhol was adding Nico (Christa Päffgen) as an additional vocalist and frontperson; an experienced model, actress, and singer, Nico was a central figure in Warhol's Factory scene at the time (see Chapter 13). John Cale recounted that "we were stunned by Andy's suggestion to include her in the Velvet Underground … but we were far too self-concerned to either argue or refuse…. She was quintessentially the person that Andy used to make us aware of another dimension: publicity and image making.'"[8] In effect, Nico was added to provide some star power and Morrissey bluntly stated that "Tom Wilson and MGM/Verve only bought [*The Velvet Underground and Nico*] from me because of Nico. He saw no talent in Lou."[9]

By way of compromise, a working relationship was established in that the Velvets "were eager to do something and Andy was giving them the chance to be famous … so they all agreed to Andy and Paul's proposal that Nico be allowed to sing some songs and when she wasn't singing just stand on stage looking beautiful."[10] In other words, Nico's addition was not simply her daunting singing voice but stunning "eye candy" as far as the visual presentation of the band, be it in concerts or publicity images. Unfortunately, Nico proved to be more statue than statuesque onstage and her dramatic vocals replete with a heavy German accent suggested Weimar

Republic decadence and disillusionment rather than Times Square degeneracy and detachment. While openly hostile to Nico's addition, Reed wrote a few ballads expressly for her in that attempts to have Nico sing lead on most of the existing Velvets' songs proved fruitless. As Sterling Morrison recounted, "There were problems from the very beginning, because there were only so many songs that were appropriate for Nico, and she wanted to sing them all … 'Waiting for the Man,' 'Heroin,'—all of them."[11] In short, Nico and the Velvets were not an ideal fit.

Warhol also conceived the Exploding Plastic Inevitable (EPI), in which the Velvets became the musical component of a multimedia performance unit incorporating light shows, slide projections, films, dancers, and audience interaction. Morrison recalled the sunglasses the Velvets frequently wore on stage were not simply a fashion statement but offered needed eye protection from the blinding glare generated by the barrage of lights, films, and slides. As Warhol described the EPI experience

> The Velvets played so loud and crazy I couldn't even guess the decibels, and there were images projected everywhere, one on top of the other. I'd usually watch from the balcony or take my turn at the projectors, slipping different colored gelatin slides over the lenses and turning movies like…. *Blow Job, Sleep, Empire, Kiss* ... into different colors…. We all knew something revolutionary was happening…. Things just couldn't look this strange and new without some barrier being broken.[12]

EPI participant Ronnie Cutrone recalled, "Gerald [Malanga], Mary [Woronov], and I formed a great routine for 'Venus in Furs' … Mary and I dancing with bullwhips crucifying Gerald … [and] simulate fucking each other onstage, have Andy's films blaring in the background, and the Velvets would have their backs to the audience."[13] Elaborating further on the EPI, Cutrone noted, "We were on stage with bullwhips, giant flashlights, hypodermic needles, barbells, [and] big wooden crosses. In a sense it controlled your imagination…. You were shocked because sometimes your imagination wasn't strong enough to imagine people shooting up onstage, being crucified, and licking boots."[14]

As much as pioneering the multi-media rock concert, the EPI became a sort of "Theater of Cruelty" as Antonin Artaud formulated the concept in "No More Masterpieces":

> In the "theater of cruelty" the spectator is in the center and the spectacle surrounds [them]. In this spectacle the sonorisation is constant: sounds, noises, cries are chosen first for the vibratory quality, then for what they represent. Among these gradually refined means light is interposed in turn. Light which is created merely to add color or to brighten, and which brings power, influence, suggestions with it…. After sound and light there is action, and the dynamism of action…. A violent and concentrated action…. I propose then a theater in which violent physical images crush and hypnotize the sensibility of a spectator seized by the theater as by a whirlwind of higher forces.[15]

As Artaud outlined it, the first level is *sound* as a pure intensity and then as something that can be assigned meaning. In this way, the Velvets were the sound component and base of the EPI, with their variances between beauty, cacophony, drama, and monotony acting as vibratory quality first and what the sound represented following. The second level is *light*, which in the EPI constituted a barrage of strobes, liquid gels, slides and film projections. It is only at the third level where "violent and concentrated action" is introduced, specifically the performance pieces in songs like "Venus in Furs." The problem—which is not intended as criticism—is that attempts at a Theater of Cruelty in rock concerts usually foreground "violent and concentrated action" at the first level, namely sensationalistic albeit simulated acts of sex and violence with sound and lights assuming secondary levels (e.g., Alice Cooper, the Plasmatics, or Gwar).

In April of 1966, the EPI performed regular shows at the Dom nightclub in the East Village that netted $18,000. While the run at the Dom represented the EPI's apex, the following month's EPI tour of the West Coast was the nadir. A scheduled residency from May 3 to 18 at the Trip in Los Angeles ended after three days when the club was closed down by the police. The Mothers of Invention opened for the Velvets and the crowds enthusiastically cheered and applauded the madcap Mothers while they booed and heckled the dispassionate Velvets. After repeated prodding from Bill Graham, the

Velvets agreed to a weekend showcase at San Francisco's the Fillmore West in the end of May, billed as "Pop-Op Rock" with the Mothers and Jefferson Airplane the opening acts. Steven Watson recounted

> The [EPI] were already skeptical of the San Francisco music scene, and the relationship with Bill Graham was rocky from the outset. Graham's light show consisted of a slide with a picture of the moon and a camera obscura with glass in a bowl that created an anamorphous goo floating across the wall…. The EPI informed him they did not consider this a light show, and Danny Williams organized a new one … [Paul Morrissey] called the Fillmore the Swillmore Vomitorium, and he made provocative cracks about the inadequacy of the West Coast bands and their pathetic light shows…. Zappa announced over the microphone that the Velvets "really suck." A member of the audience … recalled the nascent hippies cringing while the Velvets played…. "No one knew what it was," said one audience member Rosebud Pettet…. "They scared the fucking socks off everybody."[16]

For their parting shot, in their final Fillmore show the Velvets closed with an extended version of "European Son" that culminated in Reed, Cale, and Morrison leaning their guitars against their amps to produce howling feedback and then the entire band began bashing away simultaneously on Tucker's drums. Graham shut down the power and subsequently banned the Velvets from the venue.[17]

Ironically, the Velvets and the Mothers were working in similar terrain as far as assembling popular and avant-garde/experimental music—albeit quite differently as far as the Velvets' minimalism versus Zappa's maximalism—and both bands were at odds with California hippie subculture: immediate contempt in the case of the Velvets, eventual distain in the case of Zappa. John Cale stated, "Our attitude to the West Coast was one of hate and derision…. It was some kind of airy-fairy puritanism that was based on the suppression of all adult feelings."[18] Moe Tucker put it more succinctly: "I didn't like that peace-love shit."[19] Nonetheless, the rivalry between the Mothers and the Velvets was symbolic of the substantial differences

between East Coast and West Coast counterculture. As Christopher Gair noted,

> The Velvet Underground, in their tight jeans, did not look like the bell-bottomed hippies and their ultra-loud ironic songs did not sound like West Coast psychedelia. While Warhol's efforts to transform painterly techniques into multi-media performances appealed to the speed-fueled, gay-inflected New York scene, the emphasis on sadomasochism and leather was out of place in the generally homophobic Californian counterculture. In addition, the show came off as too controlled and at odds with the improvisation inherent to the lengthy acid-rock jams that dominated at the Fillmore.[20]

The spontaneity of the Mothers of Invention's Dadaistic "anti-concerts" versus the EPI as Theater of Cruelty can be framed around Susan Sontag's assessment of the Theater of Cruelty where "at least in intention (Artaud's practice in the nineteen-twenties and thirties would be another matter), his theater had little in common with the anti-theater and the playful, sadistic assault conceived by … the Dada artists…. The aggressiveness that Artaud proposed is controlled and intricately orchestrated."[21] Indeed, Gair's use of the word "controlled" becomes a crucial distinction between the intensive aural-visual assault of the EPI as Theater of Cruelty and the improvised, chaotic hostility of the Mothers' concerts as Dadaist. Moreover, if the Mothers' concerts were Dadaistic or Brechtian in their theatricality, it was a concerted effort by Zappa to impose a harsh and humorous critical distance between performer and audience, thereby demystifying and exposing the rock concert's function as entertainment. With the EPI and the affinity to Artaud, the rock concert was a means of enveloping and exploding the audiences' consciousness amid the aural and visual sensory overload spearheaded by the Velvets

Ultimately, this aesthetic dissimilarity was part of the larger differences between the emergent countercultures in New York (the Velvets), Los Angeles (the Mothers), and San Francisco (the Grateful Dead). As the counterculture ascended and the schism grew between and within the East Coast and West Coast countercultures, the rivalry became territorial as far as which locale would become the epicenter of the counterculture

movement of the 1960s and whose representation of counterculture would win out. While West Coast psychedelia and hippiedom ultimately defined counterculture in American popular consciousness by the late 1960s, Lester Bangs argued

> Rumblings were beginning to be heard simultaneously on both coasts. Ken Kesey embarked on the Acid Tests with the Grateful Dead in Frisco, and Andy Warhol left New York to tour the nation with the Exploding Plastic Inevitable rock shows (a violent, sado-masochistic barrage of the senses and sensibilities in which Alice Cooper is the comparatively innocuous comic-book reflection) and the Velvet Underground. Both groups … claimed to be utilizing the possibilities of feedback and distortion, and both groups claimed to be avatars of the psychedelic multimedia trend. Who got the jump on who between Kesey and Warhol is insignificant…. The Velvets, for all the seeming crudity in their music, were interested in the possibilities of noise right from the outset, and had John Cale's extensive conservatory training to help shape their experiments, while the Dead seemed more like … ex-folkies dabbling in distortion.[22]

## *Making History:* The Velvet Underground and Nico

No album in rock history has received more retroactive critical praise than *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, which received little critical attention and sold poorly when it was released in 1967; it currently ranks #13 on the *Rolling Stone* list of the 500 Greatest Albums of All Time and considered one of the most influential rock albums, particularly on punk, post-punk, and Alternative music genres. Coinciding with the EPI's run at the Dom, the Velvets recorded the bulk of *The Velvet Underground and Nico* over the course of three days in New York City in April 1966. Despite the co-billing, Nico only sang lead on three of the album's eleven songs ("Femme Fatale," "All Tomorrows Parties," and "I'll Be Your Mirror") and Reed reportedly did not want her on the album at all. After the Velvets signed to MGM/Verve, three songs—"Heroin," "I'm Waiting for My Man," and "Venus in Furs"—were rerecorded in Los Angeles with producer Tom

Wilson.[23] It is generally agreed that the LA recording was done in May 1966 and hastily scheduled when the EPI tour fell apart. A third recording session in NYC ca. November 1966 yielded the ballad "Sunday Morning" which became the album's opening track and second single. However, while the intention was adding another song with commercial potential featuring Nico, in that she sang "Sunday Morning" in concert, Reed insisted on singing the lead vocals on the studio version much to the displeasure of Morrissey, Wilson, and Nico.

The production credited to Andy Warhol has been widely debated, although Tom Wilson was credited as producer of "Sunday Morning" and "remix supervision." Joe Harvard argued that Norman Dolph and John Licata, engineers for the first NYC sessions, merited (at the very least) a co-production credit while Dolph felt that as far as the producer's role of shaping the songs into the final recorded product John Cale was most deserving of "producer" credit.[24] In turn, Cale insisted that Tom Wilson, as far as supervising the re-recorded songs and the remix of the first NYC sessions, was indeed the producer of *The Velvet Underground and Nico* whereas "Andy Warhol didn't do anything."[25] Nonetheless, Warhol served an important role as "producer." In an interview with *Fusion* (March 1970), Sterling Morrison suggested Warhol was "'producer' in the sense of producing a film." Warhol helped provide financial capital to record the album, had the cultural capital to interest major labels, and served as a buffer between the Velvets and the record company as far as creative control. As Reed pointed out, "As a consequence of [Warhol] being the producer, we'd just walk in and set up and do what we always did and no one would stop it because Andy was the producer. Of course he didn't know anything about record production."[26]

Lester Bangs' aforementioned description of the Grateful Dead as "ex-folkies dabbling in distortion" could also be superficially applied to *VU and Nico*, especially if one compares the *VU and Nico* versions of "Heroin," "Venus in Furs," and "All Tomorrow's Parties" to the acoustic demos recorded at Cale's apartment in summer of 1965 (the "Ludlow Street demos" included in the *Peel Slowly and See* box-set). "Heroin" opened the second side. Sung by Reed with lyrics explicitly describing intravenous drug use, "Heroin" repeats a folky D-G chord alternation throughout and

the changes are rhythmic rather than melodic.[27] Instead of a verse-chorus structure, there is a "slow-fast" structure where the guitar is strummed lethargically while Tucker provides a death-march thud on the one of each bar alternating with the guitar strummed rapidly while Tucker furiously plays eight-note rolls. Cale plays a monotonal drone on electric voila for the majority of the song until it abruptly changes in the final two minutes with Cale providing a lengthy, atonal, free-form solo with copious distortion and feedback until the song closes with the guitar slowly strumming an F. As a representation of drug addiction, the slow-fast alternations the cycle between the trying inertia waiting to get high and the euphoric rush of drug use. Cale's viola noise over the last fast section signifies the "final rush" of an overdose, and the guitar finally breaking the D-G alternation by concluding in F suggests the end result has been death.[28]

Along with "Heroin," "Venus in Furs" remains one of the Velvets' more controversial and well-known songs. As the title indicates, the lyrics were derived from Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's novel *Venus in Furs*, which detailed sexual practices of bondage and fetishism subsequently defined around the term "masochism." Unlike "Heroin" and its folk influences, "Venus in Furs" has something of an "Eastern music" feel in its droning, psychedelic guitars while Cale's viola produces a grating monotone with abrupt, ascending glissandos reminiscent of a tamboura. Tucker plays a bass drum loudly on the one and a tambourine in half-time on the three of each bar with an occasional one-bar shift to a backbeat on the two and four.[29] Whereas "Heroin" operated on the rhythmic dynamics of the slow-fast sections, "Venus in Furs" is propelled by a sluggish, deliberate, unwavering beat overlaid with droning atonality that suggests *stasis* and the overall sound of the song manufactures a kind of dungeon atmosphere.[30]

In *Coldness and Cruelty*, Gilles Deleuze argued a fundamental error is conflating sadism and masochism into "sado-masochism" when sadism and masochism are vastly different procedures and experiences.

> In Masoch's novels, it is moments of suspense that are the climatic moments…. Masoch was the first novelist to make use of suspense as an essential ingredient of romantic fiction. This is partly because the masochistic rites of torture and suffering imply actual physical

> suspension (the hero is hung up, crucified or suspended), but also because the woman torturer freezes into postures that identify her with a statue, a painting of photograph…. The aesthetic and dramatic suspense of Masoch contrasts with the mechanical, cumulative repetition of Sade.[31]

On "Venus in Furs" the Velvet's offered a musical representation of Sacher-Masoch's literature whereas the relentless mechanical, cumulative repetition of "Sister Ray" from *White Light/White Heat* became a musical representation of Sade's literature (discussed next chapter). In "Venus in Furs" the melodic and rhythmic monotony is used to exacerbate *suspense* and the verses utilize suspended guitar chords such as Dsus2 and D7sus4 along with Dm and D7.[32] The effect of subtle tonal variations and suspensions around D, the not-so-subtle atonality of the bowed viola drones along with brief glissandi, and the slow, teetering rhythmic drive suggests a suspended body swaying in the air. The verse lyrics are written so Reed, with his trademark ironic detachment, describes the characters and scenes from Masoch's novel in the third person as a kind of voyeur/observer reporting on the masochistic display. The chorus shifts to a more insistent F7-A♯add11-C7♯9-F7 pattern in which Reed sings in the first person, although it is unclear whether Reed adopts the perspective of Severin, the submissive main male character, or if Reed retains the perspective of the increasingly fatigued voyeur surveying the action (or lack thereof) in the masochistic ritual.

Whether intended or not, two of the songs on *VU and Nico* that Nico sang lead on were the more self-referential songs about the Factory: "Femme Fatale" and "All Tomorrow's Parties."[33] Sterling Morrison recalled, "Nico had two voices. One was a full-register, Germanic, *gotterdammerung* voice that I never cared for, and the other was her wispy voice which I liked."[34] The band insisted Nico use the "wispy voice" on "Femme Fatale," a song written about former Factory superstar Edie Sedgwick by Reed at the request of Warhol. Given that Warhol and Sedgwick's relationship acrimoniously ended by early 1966, "Femme Fatale" was anything but a tribute, depicting the titular object of the song as vain, shallow, and manipulative with tangible bile permeating the straightforward, even pretty rock ballad setting. It also effectively demonstrated the Velvets' minimalist

rock aesthetic in that the verses consist of Cmaj7-Fmaj9 alternations ending in a Dm-G progression while the chorus is C-F alternations ending in a Dm-A♯-G progression.

While sometimes identified as another song Reed wrote at Warhol's request about the Factory, "All Tomorrow's Parties" dated back to at least 1965.[35] "ATP" has a slow backbeat provided by Tucker (as with "Venus in Furs," using bass drum and tambourine) over which Cale played continuous eight notes around a tonic D on prepared piano: Cale made a large chain of paper clips and wove them between the piano strings to produce a metallic, percussive effect. It also strongly recalls Terry Riley's minimalist composition *In C* (1964) in which Riley's performance directions suggest "the ensemble can be aided by means of an eight note pulse played on the high c's of a piano or on a mallet instrument."[36] "ATP" is also a song in which Reed used the "Ostrich tuning" with all the guitar strings tuned to octaves of D. While the piano and percussion provide the pulse as a driving beat, the guitar wanders about the song playing fragmentary blocs of solos that might initially be dismissed as psychedelic noodling but drift throughout with a disconcerting dissonance. Unlike "Femme Fatale," "ATP" Nico sings in her "götterdämmerung voice" to heighten the drama of the song's paradoxical drive and inertia. The tension becomes a kind of listlessness between the steady piano/percussion propulsion, the seemingly directionless guitar soloing, and dramatic vocals. It effectively capturing the drug-fueled, around-the-clock Factory scene as one of a continual going on and yet going nowhere. Indeed, "ATP" offers a critique of the counterculture that is just effective as the Mothers' much more direct, sardonic, and condescending commentaries such as "Who Needs the Peace Corps?" Both songs represent the counterculture as pathetic, although in "Peace Corps" the counterculture scene is comically wretched, whereas in "ATP" it becomes tragically pitiable.

While *VU and Nico* is now firmly established in the canon of classic rock albums, Warhol recalled "The whole time the album was being made, no one seemed really happy about it, especially Nico. 'I want to sound like Bawwhhhb Dee-lahhhn,' she wailed."[37] To be sure, there were numerous tensions and pressures within and around the Velvets concerning creative control, musical direction, and market demands that influenced the degrees

mass music and theoretical music could and would be negotiated. The result was an eclectic collection of songs that ranged from the mellow folk-pop of the opening track "Sunday Morning" to the cacophonic chaos of the closing track "European Son (for Delmore Schwartz)," a seven minute-plus exercise in pounding noise production that featured a transitional passage of Cale pushing a chair into a stack of metal plates. The underlying problem is what David Fricke termed the "panoramic spread of the *Nico* album and the sharp commercial focus of *Loaded*."[38] While the sharp commercial focus of *Loaded* is addressed in Chapter 13, the panoramic spread of *VU and Nico* could be less charitably termed unfocused and the final result an album by a band struggling to define an identity.

Adding to the myths constructed around *VU and Nico* is that Verve delayed release of the album until March of 1967. Among the reasons circulated include that Verve simply panicked upon hearing the finished product and shelved it, that Warhol and Morrissey were too indifferent and/or incompetent as management to navigate record industry politics, and even accusations Frank Zappa actively lobbied Verve to squelch *VU and Nico* and channel their resources into *Freak Out!*[39] In fact, *VU and Nico*'s delayed release owed to several factors, compounded by an increasing sense that the album had limited commercial viability. If nothing else, the EPI's poorly received West Coast shows demonstrated the Velvets had little market potential with the California counterculture and the Mothers' *Freak Out!* proved to be a commercial failure. An edited version of "All Tomorrow's Parties" released as a single in summer of 1966 failed to chart, and Tom Wilson decided the album needed another song as a potential hit single featuring Nico. Reed wrote the pop-ballad "Sunday Morning" for inclusion on *VU and Nico* but, as noted, Reed also insisted on singing the lead vocals. Released as a single in late 1966, "Sunday Morning" failed to chart as well. To be sure, songs like "Heroin," "Venus in Furs," "Black Angel's Death Song" and "European Son" did not scream hit potential.

Moreover, the Warhol-designed record cover was a major reason for initially delaying the album's release, eventually requiring specialized equipment and extra manual labor that also raised production costs. It consisted of a yellow banana on white background with "Andy Warhol" written in large black letters in the lower right corner while the name of the

band was conspicuously absent on the front cover.[40] In the upper right corner the instructions read "peel slowly and see" with an arrow pointing to the banana top. The banana skin actually was a sticker that could be peeled off the cover to reveal a pink banana (read: a penis). As Victor Bockris and Gerald Malanga argued, the issue becomes if MGM/Verve allegedly shelved *VU and Nico*, they also "released it in such an expensive package. The only explanation would be an attempt to emphasize the Warhol connection … in the hope it would sell more copies."[41] For all intent and purposes, the goal was enticing the rock consumer into buying an Andy Warhol album cover with a Pop Art gimmick with a Velvet Underground album included as a bonus item.

*VU and Nico* also featured a gatefold cover in black and white. Along with EPI concert photos there were individual photos of Reed, Morrison, and Tucker. Cale and Nico were in a photo together as a parody of a generic couple's photo and, coincidentally or not, Cale and Nico also represented the Continental avant-garde wing of the Velvets and collaborated after their respective dismissals from the Velvets (see Chapter 13). There was also a stylized photo of Warhol with his face framed inside a tambourine, underscoring the pervasive presence of Warhol as the brand identity of *VU and Nico*. The gatefold liner notes contained several vivid if not necessarily complementary press excerpts of the EPI shows ranging from *The Village Voice* to *Variety*, reflective of Warhol's unabashed use of self-promotion as part and parcel of cultural production and consumption: exemplified by Warhol's credo "Don't read your press, weigh it." The press excerpts describing the aural-visual assault of the EPI shows raised listener expectations for an avant-rock album experience that, at several points, was relatively subdued and musically accessible.

On the back cover, "The Velvet Underground and Nico" was written on top with "Produced by Andy Warhol" directly underneath. Again, the brand name on the album cover was Warhol as much as the Velvets, creating the impression *VU and Nico* was ultimately an Andy Warhol Pop Art foray into rock music. There was also a large color photo of the Velvets in concert during an EPI performance, and at the bottom five individual color photographs of the band members under various lighting effects. Unfortunately, the EPI performance photo included a film projection of

Factory participant Eric Emerson, who demanded financial compensation and threatened legal action for unauthorized use of his image. Rather than providing a nominal pay-off, MGM/Verve pulled the record and eventually redesigned it to blur out Emerson's face and body with airbrushing before re-releasing *VU and Nico* some weeks later. The recall effectively killed any commercial momentum the Velvets may or may not have been gathering, but either way it was not surprising *The Velvet Underground and Nico* languished against the canonical Summer of Love albums like Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, Jefferson Airplane's *Surrealistic Pillow*, and the Doors' eponymous debut album.

# 12

## The Black Album

*White Light/White Heat* (1968)

> We were all pulling in the same direction. We may have been dragging each other off a cliff, but we were all definitely going in the same direction.[1]
>
> —Sterling Morrison, on *White Light/White Heat*

### *Stay in Your Seats: The End of the EPI*

By the release of *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, the Velvets were in a general state of disarray that dating back to their ill-fated West Coast tour in May 1966. Over the latter half of 1966, Warhol achieved his first commercial film success with *Chelsea Girls.* A three-and-a-half hour film of mostly improvised long takes shown as split screen images (some in color, some in black and white), the sound alternating between the two images, and two projectors were required for screenings. *Newsweek* described it as "*The Iliad* of the underground." Warhol's attention turned to cinema and his interest in rock music quickly waned.

The final performance of the EPI with the Velvets (minus Nico, who was in Spain at the time) occurred on May 5, 1967, at the Scene in New York City. As Ronnie Cutrone recounted, it was not so much that the EPI had reached a dead end, but achieved their goal and there was no compelling reason to continue:

> People came to watch the EPI dance and play, they were entertained, and got a show. But when we played at the Scene I remember Gerald, Mary, and I were dancing and the audience came on stage with us and totally took over…. It was a bit sad, because we couldn't keep our glory onstage, but we were happy because what the EPI intended to do had worked—everybody was liberated to be as sick as we were acting! All the sudden there were no dancers, no show: the music had just taken everybody over at that point.[2]

Here one can compare Pink Floyd. By late 1966, Pink Floyd was performing multimedia concerts utilizing light shows as well as instrumentals that often became become extended, improvisational forays into avant-garde/experimental music. They also became subject to national controversy in the wake of the band's "Games for May" concert at Queen Elizabeth Hall on May 12, 1967—the Beatles had yet to release *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.* Games for May was a crucial moment for Pink Floyd in that they were moving into their own brand of rock theater concurrent with the dissolution of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable and the Mothers of Invention's run at the Garrick Theater. Games for May not only incorporated Pink Floyd's most ambitious light show to date, but used prerecorded tapes (*musique concrète* intro and outro) as well as a quadrophonic sound system with Rick Wright using a joystick wired to the mixing console to bounce his electric organ across the various speakers throughout the hall. The two-hour concert also featured a bubble machine, the audience being showered with daffodils, and avant-garde performance pieces such as drummer Nick Mason sawing an amplified log, bassist Roger Waters flinging potatoes at a gong, and guitarist Syd Barrett playing slide guitar with a ruler. As much as the debate over the show itself, the daffodils ended up ground into the carpet and the bubbles stained the upholstery of the seats; Pink Floyd was billed for damages and banned from Queen Elizabeth Hall.

Two days later, Pink Floyd appeared on the BBC show *Look of the Week*.[3] The *Look* telecast began with a short excerpt of Pink Floyd performing the beginning of "Pow R. Toc H."—an instrumental featuring a variety of non-verbal "primitive" vocal sounds (cf. the Mothers' "The Return of the Son of Monster Magnet"). This cut to violinist/musicologist Hans Keller's

introductory remarks telling the viewers "I don't want to prejudice you" and then preemptively listing the reasons he disliked Pink Floyd in order to prejudice said viewers.[4] Straight away, Keller complained that the music consisted of "continuous repetition … and [was] a bit boring" as well as the overall volume being "terribly loud." Shifting to passive-aggressive mode, Keller suggested his issues with Pink Floyd stemmed from being "a little too much of a musician to appreciate them" but nonetheless the band had "an audience and people who have an audience ought to be heard." The implied conclusion was that Pink Floyd's audience appreciated the band because they knew little if anything about music and thereby did not know better.

Pink Floyd then performed "Astronomy Domine"—a 12/8 song utilizing a number of jarring chord changes and rumbling tom-toms played with mallets—replete with a barrage of oil slides, strobe lights, and color gel lighting. Unfortunately, it lacked a great deal of visual impact as *Look* was telecast in black and white (the similar problem encountered by the Beatles with *Magical Mystery Tour*). Roger Waters and Syd Barrett then engaged in a Q&A with Keller. While Keller and Waters exhibited a fair amount of measured testiness towards each other, Barrett came off as affable and genuinely perplexed when Keller queried if the loud music and light shows were a display of "aggression" against the audience by the band that was not so much avant-garde shock effect but an openly hostile aural-visual version of, as Keller put it, "shock treatment." One can only imagine what Keller would have made of the EPI whip dancing routines or the Mothers' "enforced recreation" exercises in audience humiliation.

Waters responded that Pink Floyd was aspiring to be more than a "club band [and] background noise so that people could jig about" and both Waters and Barrett stressed the goal was developing Pink Floyd into a concert band with theatrical components. Rather than aggression there was a deliberate refusal to provide dance music as Pink Floyd moved into a musical/visual territory that required sitting, listening, and watching: in short, *contemplation*. In this regard, Simon Frith argued rock music is predicated on the Cartesian "mind-body" favoring the body expressed by Keith Richards' maxim that rock is "music from the neck down."[5] One might say that Pink Floyd's aim was "music for the neck up" and a concert

experience for the eyes and ears rather than the feet; indeed, Pink Floyd could be termed one of rock's first overtly Cartesian bands in that the mind was given priority over the body. Pink Floyd's output in the late 1960s could also prove to be difficult listening (particularly the 1969 double-album *Ummagumma* which suggested a nexus of psychedelic rock with the likes of Stockhausen or Xenakis) and "jigging about" was inhibited by Pink Floyd's increased emphasis on slower meters, drum patterns as opposed to backbeats, and free-form instrumental excursions. In order to achieve this artistic progress as much as garner commercial success on a larger scale, Pink Floyd moved away from the counterculture settings of places like the dingy UFO Club into the bourgeois domain of posh venues like Queen Elizabeth Hall. Ultimately, as much as Pink Floyd was at the forefront of British counterculture—and as avant-garde as the music and performances could be—the conditions of audience reception for Pink Floyd as they became a concert band in concert hall locations came with prescribed modes of conduct consistent with bourgeois culture and ideology.[6]

However, this change in the rock performer-audience relationship did not simply stem from bands moving into concert halls but counterculture demands and expectations where sitting and watching performances became the preferred mode of audience reception. Robert Wyatt, drummer/vocalist of Soft Machine, described this occurring at the UFO Club by the late 1960s:

> In keeping with the general ersatz orientalism of the social set-up, you'd have an audience sitting down…. Just the general atmosphere created by an audience sitting down was very inductive to playing … a long gentle droning introduction to a tune. It's quite impossible if you've got a room full of beer-swigging people standing waiting for action…. But if you've got a floor full of people, even the few who are actually listening, they're quite happy to wait a half hour for the first tune to get off the ground. So that was a wonderful influence, or a terrible influence according to your taste, but it was an influence on what the musicians played.[7]

As discussed, Frank Zappa's frustration with audiences more interested in the stage show shenanigans than the music—"people go to *see* their favorite

acts, not hear them"—was a motivation to convert the rock concert in a Dada anti-concert and making audience debasement a central facet of the Mothers' concert experience. The Stooges' concerts could and would become "situations" in which the audience was as crucial as the performers in determining the course of a given show and provocation leading to confrontation was not uncommon. With Pink Floyd, the rock concert was infused with avant-garde spectacle and the audience (willingly) became spectators. Discussing the Happenings of the 1960s, Susan Sontag argued that "the abusive involvement of the audience seems to provide … the dramatic spine of the Happening. When the Happening is more purely spectacle, and the audience simply spectators … the event is considerably less dense and compelling."[8]

The dissolution of the EPI in early May 1967 was prompted by provoking a momentary breakdown in the barrier between the performer and audience demarcated by the stage. The audience became active participants in the spectacle rather than passive spectators simply watching the performance—at least for that final EPI show and whether that could or would have continued is a matter of speculation. Nonetheless, the EPI's finale could be compared to what Artaud theorized in "The Theater of Cruelty (Second Manifesto)" where "the spectacle will be extended … to the entire hall of the theater … will physically envelop the spectator and immerse [them] in a constant bath of light, images, movements, and noises."[9] The psychedelic concert experience became defined—and, to a certain extent, standardized—around the aural-visual stimuli of lengthy jamming, the light show, and audience conduct emphasizing passive spectatorship over active participation (save for dancing as a stylized writhing in place). This ultimately reinforced the normative concert relationship between performer and audience, a relationship where the rock concert maintained its status as a "show" within established constructs of musical production and consumption.

## *Sex, Drugs and Noise:* White Light/White Heat

As well as the dissolution of the EPI, in May of 1967 Nico was dismissed from the Velvets. For several months prior, Nico was performing as a solo folksinger as well as occasionally performing with the Velvets as her schedule permitted or it suited her purposes. When the Velvets played a weekend engagement in Boston, Nico arrived as the Velvets were finishing the Saturday show; Reed refused to let Nico on stage and soon after fired her. In the wake of the debut album's perceived failure—at the time, at least—and a continued inability to make any commercial headway, soon after Nico's termination Reed asked Warhol to release the band from their contract.[10] His interest in rock music steadily dissipating in favor of film, Warhol agreed. Steve Sesnick, who had been making overtures to Reed in the previous months, became the new manager (Sesnick's controversial role in the dissolution of the Velvets is discussed next chapter).

Reverting to their original pre–Warhol, pre–Nico, Pre-EPI quartet configuration, the Velvets moved much further into avant-garde musical territory for their second album. *White Light/White Heat* was recorded in two days in fall of 1967 and released by MGM/Verve in early 1968. Again produced by Tom Wilson, *WL/WH* was a brutal exercise in avant-rock minimalism consciously designed to capture the aural ferocity the band generated in concert, something lacking on the first album with the exception of the closing track "European Son." Indeed, *WL/WH* largely jettisoned balladry in favor of repetitive, often discordant if not atonal rock and roll. Fittingly, the album cover was seemingly all black with just the album title and the band name along the top in white separated by the Verve record logo. However, on the left side there was a faint but discernible image of a photo negative of a man's arm with a skull and dagger tattoo on his upper bicep. The back cover was an overexposed black and white photo. Taken from a low angle and from the left, it depicts Reed, Morrison and Cale seated with Tucker standing between Reed and Morrison and the band looking to the side, not so much intently staring at an off-frame object but indifferently ignoring the camera.

The title track was a thinly disguised ode to intravenous amphetamine use, using a conventional and rudimentary 1950s rock and roll framework that was distorted in all senses of the word. The verses are entirely in A shifting to E only on the third line of the verse; the chorus are A-D alternations with

a short G-D alternation in the latter half of the chorus, with Cale's overdriven fuzz bass line periodically playing a half-step from the guitar chords.[11] As on "I'm Waiting for My Man" (*VU and Nico*, a song about trying to buy heroin in Harlem), Cale overdubbed a monotonal yet dissonant boogie-woogie piano suggesting a cross between Jerry Lee Lewis and Henry Cowell.[12] In the final forty-seven seconds of the song, the mix becomes overwhelmed by Cale's distorted bass as he plays a repeated F♯-G♯ hammer-on increasingly out of time as well as out-of-tune with the rest of the band: an effect purportedly designed to replicate the auditory effect of speed use. Ironically, it also suggested Cale being thoroughly out of tune with the rest of the band as he was fired after *WL/WH* and the Velvets adopted a much more commercial, straightforward rock and roll sound (discussed next chapter).

"The Gift" was an eight-plus minute, slow-to-mid tempo song anchored by a continually repeated, one-bar D-G-C riff on fuzz bass (played almost entirely on the highest three strings at the fifth fret), a plodding backbeat, and Reed/Morrison guitar interactions that veer from jangly psychedelia to jagged chord hacking to jarring, unrestrained feedback.[13] As well as playing bass, Cale provided the deadpan recitation and the song mixed so only the vocal was in the left channel of the stereo speakers and the music on the right. If the listener wished they could adjust the balance to one end or the other and hear, respectively, a spoken word piece or a dissonant, grinding rock instrumental. Adapted from one of Reed's short stories, "The Gift" recounts the saga of Waldo, a desperately lonely man and presumably a virgin. He is obsessed with the possibility his girlfriend Marsha, now living in another state attending college, might have sex with another man. Waldo decides to mail himself to Marsha in a large box, unaware that she has *already* had sex with another man. When Marsha attempts to open the package with a sheet metal cutter, she kills Waldo by piecing his forehead and effectively performing an accidental home lobotomy. As the punchline to the black comedy of "The Gift," Waldo finally consummates his relationship with Marsha not by "penetrating" her but being "penetrated" by Marsha in his cranium as the final moment of his life (i.e., "skull-fucked").

Lyrically chronicling a bungled surgical procedure, and ambiguous as to whether it is about a lobotomy or a sex-change procedure, the next track

“Lady Godiva’s Operation” is another slow-to-mid tempo, backbeat-driven song. It utilizes a D-C-D alternation—in effect, continuous D with two-bar insertions of C—marked by Reed’s highly distorted sound that at times sounds like the amplifier is in the process of short-circuiting. The halting guitar riffing suggests an uncertain stabbing against the backbeat as the steady, systematic rhythm of a surgery in progress. With little if any connection to the tonal or rhythmic basis of the song, Cale’s viola “saws away” in the background suggesting the sound of surgical tools and/or disembodied cries: an amputation in progress. Cale’s lethargic yet dour vocals—one might say singing through a haze of “anesthesia”—focuses on descriptions of the sedated patient, referred to as a male in the lyrics despite the title. Midway through Reed begins interrupting Cale’s vocals with abrupt, nasal vocal interjections until Cale and Reed beginning alternating lead vocals increasingly off-key and off-time with the music. At 4:02, the song briefly stops and overwhelmed by a wash of noise resembling a heavy, mechanical sigh or moaning. The music clumsily fades back in while the electronic labored breathing can be heard as well, with Reed and Cale’s vocal trade-offs become more agitated with a growing awareness that something has gone horribly wrong during the operation. Ultimately, as far as rock music’s Cartesian basis, on both “Lady Godiva’s Operation” and “The Gift” the Velvets’ musical-lyrical assault can be heard as simultaneously directed at the mind and the body, from the neck up as well as the waist down, or more crudely the brain and the genitals.

“Here She Comes Now” closed side one, a brief and relatively sedate song closest to the psychedelic-folk leanings of the first album. Another example of rock minimalism, the song is a D-G alteration (cf. “Heroin”) ending with a brief A♯ break with the cycle repeated throughout. The double-entendre of the title suggests it is a song about sex and female orgasm, with the irony of the song being said climax promised by the title is never being achieved; the song fades out after two minutes repeating the D-G(-A♯) progression without variation while the chorus consists of Reed chanting the title with the key substitution of the word “*if*” instead of “here.” Given the Velvets’ predilection for songs about drug use, the “she” of the title can also be metaphor of drugs and awaiting an intoxication that fails to occurs (i.e., female code names for drugs like “Mary Jane” for marijuana, “Lucy” for LSD, “Crystal” for methamphetamine, “Mandy” for Mandrax, “Molly” for

MDMA, etc.). Another interpretation is that the song is Reed's ode to his guitar with the title taken from Reed's habit of yelling "Here she comes now!" to cue the band before launching into a guitar solo in concerts (this can be heard during "Rock and Roll" on *Loaded*) with the irony being there is no guitar solo *per se* performed during the song.

As much as the first side of *WL/WH* was anything but "easy listening," the second side consisted of two pulverizing songs. "I Heard Her Call My Name" was a proto-punk assault of Tucker's pounding drums—not always in synch with the abrasive eight-note assault of guitars—highlighted by Reed's manic vocals and his highly dissonant, heavily distorted, feedback-engulfed, free-from guitar solo breaks that threaten to completely overwhelm the mix. "Here She Comes Now" forms a kind of unofficial medley with "I Heard Here Call My Name" in that the first line of the song is Reed agitatedly yelling the title of the previous song as the song opens with free guitar soloing. In terms of sex, the female orgasm that fails to occur in "Here She Comes Now" is juxtaposed with an ecstatic and exaggerated release of male orgasm in "I Heard Her Call My Name" as signified by dissonant bursts of lead guitar given the electric guitar's coding as a "masculine" and more specifically "phallic" musical instrument in rock culture (cf. the Mothers' "My Guitar Wants to Kill Your Mama"). As far as drug connotations, Reed's stuttering, fragmented, rapid-fire delivery of the vocals mirrored speech patterns associated with amphetamine use (a similar effect mimicked by Roger Daltrey in the Who's "My Generation"). In turn, as a celebration of rock and roll—a theme later manifest on *Loaded*'s "Sweet Jane" and especially "Rock and Roll" in much more musically accessible frameworks—and a song about his guitar, "I Heard Her Call My Name" takes rock and roll abandon to extremes in its careening and relentless eight-note drive punctuated by free soloing liberated from tonal confines. Ultimately, "Here She Comes Now" and "I Heard Her Call My Name" can be heard as forming a two-part saga of the delayed expectations and actualized thrills of sex, drugs, and/or rock and roll as the triumvirate of rock rebellion in the late 1960s: the former expressing anticipation through a controlled, quiet ballad and the latter expressing exhilaration in an unbridled, discordant rock rave-up.

*WL/WH* closed with the tour de force of "Sister Ray," a *seventeen*-plus minute song based on two-bar, G-F-C riff and pounding drums repeated throughout the song's duration. A macabre and surreal song, lyrically it recounts a drug-fueled, transvestite orgy that ends in a murder. However, key words have multiple meanings and the listener familiar with counterculture slang is left with little doubt Reed that is frequently referring to intravenous drug use and fellatio. When a fatal shooting at the party occurs, it can refer to a gunshot and a murder, "shooting up" drugs and overdosing, or male ejaculation and "shooting a load" followed by the "little death" of orgasm. The subsequent mention of stained carpet could refer to blood, semen, urine, vomit or any combination of the above. While certainly much tamer as far as graphic descriptions, lyrically the imagery of "Sister Ray" compares to the writings of Sade as an evocative as opposed to an explicit account of *transgression*, an intense and intensive (albeit temporary) erasure of the limits imposed by *social constructs* of "morality" and "law."[14] Moreover, Gilles Deleuze contended "sadism operates by means of quantitative reiteration, masochism by means of qualitative suspense."[15] As touched on, it is "qualitative suspense" that becomes crucial in "Venus in Furs" and its musical/lyrical representation of masochism. "Quantitative reiteration" becomes crucial in "Sister Ray" as a musical/lyrical representation of sadism.

Determined to capture the Velvet's live sound, "Sister Ray" was recorded in a single take with no overdubs or edits and played with the amplifier settings they used in concert. Cale recounted, "We never quite realized that there were technical problems involved in turning up everything up past nine…. We were working in a very small studio with no isolation … it was all this noise just smashing into more noise."[16] Moreover, there was no supervision in the studio control booth to correct the mix and prevent inevitable problems like overall distortion on the recording due to overloading the microphones and board as well as the ambient noises like amplifier buzz and feedback that occurred during the live recording. Tom Wilson was not present at the session and Reed recalled engineer Gary Kellgren politely but firmly told him, "I don't have to listen to this…. I'll put on 'record' and I'm leaving. When you're done, come get me."[17]

“Sister Ray” begins with the band playing the main riff and could be taken for any number 1960s garage bands and the “lo-fi” conditions of production make it sound if “Sister Ray” could have been actually recorded in a garage. After Reed sings the first verse, at 1:52 Cale plays his first organ solo and stays within the overall parameters of garage rock (e.g., Question Mark and the Mysterians’ “96 Tears”) accompanied by a brief guitar lead. This is followed by the second verse and at 4:00 the first guitar/organ collision occurs when Reed plays his first free guitar solo against Cale’s increasingly dissonant garage rock organ blasts.[18] Morrison stated that the noticeable shift in sound and volume in his guitar midway through the song was not done in mixing the track; he manually switched the pickups on his guitar from bridge to neck position in order to boost the bass end as he was being increasingly drowned out by Reed and Cale.

A marked deviation occurs approximately 5:20 into “Sister Ray” when Tucker switches from a backbeat to a double-time beat so the snare sounds like it is playing on the upbeats and, as the synchronization of the song breaks down over its duration, it often sounds as if Tucker is playing the snare on every beat (i.e., 1–2–3–4…). In this sense, while the meter of the song remains the same, the song sounds like it “accelerates” and “deaccelerates” in tempo. Cale’s organ playing increasingly breaks loose from the garage rock style into atonal runs and equally atonal repetitive arpeggios to suggest a distorted, demented calliope as the orgy becomes more frenzied. At 6:30, Reed resumes singing, mainly repeating select phrases from the first two verses—namely the ones that reference drug use and oral sex—in a more fragmented, agitated delivery punctuated by non-verbal vocal sounds; Reed continues this style of singing when the vocals intermittently reappear through the remainder of “Sister Ray.” At 7:30, there is a slight increase in the meter of the song as Reed plays a second free guitar solo much louder in the mix and, like Cale’s organ, moves further into atonality over the locomotive propulsion of the Morrison/Tucker rhythm section.

Around the ten minute mark, “Sister Ray” seems to slow down but this is more a function of volume as the performance becomes “quieter” to the extent Reed and Cale begin to play more sporadically rather than constantly. By this point, Cale’s organ abandons any semblance of garage

rock and plays a recurring tone cluster and background drones. At one level, this becomes a momentary break for the listener as far as the sonic battery provided by the song up to that point. At another level, the sudden element of silence becomes a shock in its own right, and a means by which "Sister Ray" builds further force. At 14:14, "Sister Ray" briefly collapses as Tucker begins to play what sounds like a climatic drum roll only to have the momentum taken up by a monotonal eight-note drive on the guitar. At 15:00, the meter of the song noticeably speeds-up and it appears "Sister Ray" is going to climax in a noise rave-up ending typical used in rock song, especially in the live setting as an end to the concert. However, at approximately 16:00 the initial guitar riff can be heard emerging out of the noise while Tucker resumes the quarter note snare beat; at 16:10 she abruptly switches to the double-time beat so while the meter remains the same the tempo of the song again suddenly accelerates. In this sense, "Sister Ray" and the orgy of transgression—musical as well as lyrical—has yet to fully exhaust itself and the song resumes with a final reprise of lyrical fragments about shooting up drugs shortly before the 17-minute mark when the meter of the song briefly but continually become faster and finally falls apart into free-form noise and then ceases save for Cale's dissonant organ chord lasting several more seconds. The listener is left with an aural imagery of bodies sexually spent, passed out on drugs, or simply dead.

As noted, Gilles Deleuze argued that "the aesthetic and dramatic suspense of Masoch contrasts with the mechanical, cumulative repetition of Sade."[19] One could also say the aesthetic and dramatic suspense of "Venus in Furs" contrasts with the mechanical, cumulative repetition of "Sister Ray."[20] "Venus in Furs" was directly inspired by Sacher-Masoch's novel and musically represented the masochistic ritual through its leaden beat, dissonant viola drones, and suspended guitar chords. With its three-chord/backbeat becoming the foundation for extended noise production, "Sister Ray" can be heard as the Velvets' version of the Marquis de Sade's work. Like Sade's writings, "Sister Ray" punishes the listener in its formal relentlessness as much as any overtly obscene content. As discussed in Chapter 7, the Mothers of Invention's "The Return of the Son of Monster Magnet" can be interpreted as a satirical attempt to kill popular music through the comical noise of backbeat monotony and non-verbal vocal sounds. "Sister Ray" performs the same function without resorting to

Zappa's self-consciousness in attacking popular music. Reiterating Jacques Attali, "Listening to noise is a little like being killed … listening to music is to attend a ritual murder."[21] As a lyrical account of an orgy of transgression that ends in homicide, "Sister Ray" becomes a transgressive orgy of sexually charged rock music saturated in the violence of dissonance and noise where the listener is repeatedly killed.

# 13

## Playing It Safe

### The Velvet Underground *(1969) and* Loaded *(1970)*

> We can't get too lost in the mystique of the Velvet Underground…. It's still called the Velvet Underground. But what it really is is something else.[1]
>
> —Lou Reed on *Loaded*

### *Exit John Cale:* The Velvet Underground

Not surprisingly, *White Light/White Heat* suffered the same fate as *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, failing commercially and receiving minimal critical attention at the time. With Lou Reed and John Cale increasingly at odds over musical direction, namely Reed's ambitions to make the Velvets a more musically accessible and commercially viable band versus Cale's avant-garde leanings, Cale was fired in the fall of 1968. Sterling Morrison recounted Reed gave him and Tucker an ultimatum that either Cale was out or Reed was going to leave the Velvets; knowing Reed's departure would effectively end the band, they reluctantly agreed to Cale's ouster.[2] Multi-instrumentalist Doug Yule was quickly enlisted as Cale's replacement on bass and vocals (as well as occasional keyboards in the studio), allowing Morrison to play guitar full time rather than usually switching to bass on songs Cale played viola or keyboards in concert. Contrary to the myth that Yule was a devout fan of the Velvets, his joining the band owed to circumstance in that the band occasionally stayed in the same apartment complex he lived in when they played shows in Boston.

> I started practicing guitar a lot…. Sterling Morrison was hanging out there and he heard me play, and he went back to the hotel where Lou Reed was staying, and happened to mention I was getting better…. A few weeks after that, John Cale got fired and they called me up…. I heard them play once…. I was really impressed with their impact…. It didn't make want to be with them, but it gave me a lot of ideas…. It was a complete surprise when they called…. It could have been anyone who called and said, "I need a guitar player." OK, I'll be there.[3]

It was not coincidental that at the Velvets' third album *The Velvet Underground* (1969) was a significant departure from the dissonance and noise of *WL/WH*. Dominated by ballads, to say *The Velvet Underground* was "restrained" in the aftermath of *WL/WH* is an understatement. The band left Verve and signed with MGM itself, with the album's production credited to the band. However, Lou Reed remixed the album himself after engineer Val Valentin completed what was intended as the final mix, apparently without anyone else's knowledge or permission. Ron Jovanovic noted, "The resultant mix was somewhat flat sounding and referred to as 'the closet mix' … an accusation leveled by Sterling Morrison. 'I thought it sounded like it was recorded in a closet…. To judge from the results, to bring the vocals up and the instruments down, I guess [Reed] felt the essence of the songs was the lyrics.'"[4]

The opening track "Candy Says" with Doug Yule singing lead typified the overall mood of the record, a slow ballad that sounded more akin to Simon and Garfunkel than anything from *WL/WH* although there was an ironic subversion in the lyrics as "Candy Says" was about transgender "Warhol Superstar" Candy Darling.[5] The exceptions were "What Goes On" and "Beginning to See the Light" as mid-tempo, simple rock songs utilizing the Velvets' trademark of limited chord changes and steady rhythmic drive pursued further on *Loaded*. However, *The Velvet Underground* did not entirely forsake the avant-garde elements. Running just under nine minutes, "The Murder Mystery" represented the Velvets' most overt example of studio composition. It begins by alternating between two highly contrasting musical statements. One can be termed frantic, a fast musical section of rumbling toms-toms and periodic crash cymbal, skittish guitar riffing, and

staccato organ runs with Reed and Morrison reciting different verses of poetry simultaneously in a rapid-fire fashion. The other can be termed ethereal, a slow musical section of relaxed backbeat, sparse guitar soloing, and wandering organ lines with Yule and Tucker languidly singing different verses of poetry in an overlapping call and response. Moreover, each vocal was insolated in a different stereo channel: Morrison and Tucker in the left speaker, Reed and Yule in the right speaker. If desired, the listener could listen to single voices by adjusting the speaker balance all the way to the left or the right (cf. "The Gift" isolating Cale's recitation in the left speaker channel and the instrumental track in the right speaker channel). However, this would not have necessarily helped as far as lyrically deciphering the murder mystery implied by the title. The lyrics read more like automatic writing of surrealist poetry as well as several references to events chronicled in "Sister Ray." Rather than a whodunit the song becomes a strange, grisly horror film recounting some sort of massacre with the frantic sections signifying acts of violence and murder and the ethereal sections the hunt to find the next victim.

"The Murder Mystery" ends with an extended coda and what might be described as the aftermath or investigation of the massacre. At approximately 6:30, there is a burst of organ tone clusters, followed by a rudimentary, repetitive piano figure (played by Reed) gradually modified by phasing and tape speed effects. After a minute, a second overdubbed piano enters playing a similar but more dissonant figure while Reed and Morrison quickly recite short, sporadic, different lyrical fragments at the same time. At roughly 8:15, a third piano enters aggressively playing jarring bursts of tone clusters until the final fifteen seconds when the piano figure is played solo into a fade out. If the first part of "The Murder Mystery" chronicles murder—or a succession of murders—the piano-dominated coda only deepens the mystery as the song concludes rather than offering the listener any resolution, musically or lyrically.

## *Velvets in Exile: Nico,* The Marble Index

> I do not feel connected enough … to throw stones at a policeman. I want to throw stones at the whole world.[6]
>
> —Nico

Born Christa Päffgen in Cologne, Germany, in 1938, Nico's formative years were spent in the shadow of the Third Reich, the destruction of Germany during World War II, and a Cold War-divided Berlin. By her late teens, she was successfully working as a fashion model, dividing her time between Europe and New York City. She had a bit part in Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960), appeared as the front cover model on the Bill Evans Trio's album *Moon Beams* (1962), and released a single on Immediate Records in 1965, a cover of Gordon Lightfoot's "I'm Not Sayin'" produced by Andrew Loog Oldham and arraigned by Jimmy Page. Unlike the other members of the Velvet Underground, by 1966 Nico was no stranger to show business, although John Cale was fairly well-connected to classical and avant-garde artists, musicians, and movements. Soon after meeting Andy Warhol, Nico became one of his Factory "Superstars," appearing in the films *Chelsea Girls* (1966) and *Imitation of Christ* (1967). She was also added to the Velvet Underground as a second vocalist/frontperson as a condition for Warhol taking on the band in a management/production capacity.

Nico's debut solo album *Chelsea Girl* (1967) was recorded several weeks before her dismissal from the Velvets and featured songs and musical backing from Reed, Cale, and Morrison. Jackson Browne also contributed songs and guitar, and Bob Dylan and Tim Harden each provided a song for the album. Like *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, it was produced by Tom Wilson and released on Verve. However, much of the album was soft, melodic songs with pop and folk leanings. There was no bass or drums and accompaniments were provided by guitar(s), organ, and viola; Wilson later added strings and/or flute overdubs with arrangements done by Larry Fallon. The exception and only avant-garde song on *Chelsea Girl* was the eight-minute "It Was a Pleasure Then." Co-written by Nico, Reed, and Cale (the only song on *Chelsea Girl* Nico had a writing credit), the largely improvised piece features Nico's dramatic vocals over Reed's percussive guitar patterns and Cale' electric viola groans and buzzes, eventually

building to a free from noise section (5:00–6:00) before the song gradually dissipates into scattered sounds and Nico's pained, soaring voice. It effectively became a farewell song as far as Nico's association with the Velvets.

In that Nico became known for a grim, frightening Gothic sound with her "götterdämmerung vocals" set against stark, avant-garde musical backdrops with bleak, oblique lyrics, she was extremely dissatisfied with *Chelsea Girl* and particularly Wilson's quasi-MOR strings and jazz flute additions to the basic tracks. For her second album *The Marble Index*, Nico wrote all the songs and recorded them by accompanying herself with rudimentary harmonium chords patterns as glorified drones and modulations. After Nico's basic tracks were completed, John Cale—who was fired from the Velvets around the same time—did overdubs utilizing viola, piano, electric guitar and bass, and/or percussion and in some cases eliminated the harmonium altogether. Following a few days of studio composition, he played the final results for Nico who enthusiastically approved it as the final mix.

While the Velvets were steadily breaking away from their avant-garde origins, *TMI* remains one of the essential avant-rock albums of the late 1960s, although whether it is even a rock album can be debated. As the Velvet Underground reduced to Cale and Nico, *TMI* all but dispensed with rock, namely guitar riffs and steady drumbeats, in favor of modern classical and European folk elements. The severe minimalist style was also announced by the album cover. A close-up, black and white photo of Nico staring at the camera, it was overexposed to the point it bordered on a negative image with the emphasis on her eyes, lips, and cheekbones manifesting a quasi-skeletal appearance not incongruent with the music and lyrics.

Analysis of *TMI* focuses on three songs: "No One Is There," "Frozen Warnings," and "Evening of Light." On Nico's live album *Do or Die!* (1982) she prefaced a performance of "No One Is There" with a comment that it was written about Richard Nixon on a Halloween night and now dedicated to Ronald Reagan. The potential facetious of Nico's comments notwithstanding, "No One Is There" can be read as a political song.

Lyrically, the song describes a demonic entity both clownish and evil as it agitatedly yells and dances, suggesting the histrionic speeches of the fascist agitator. The musical framework is provided Cale's overdubbed violas as a string section. However, unlike the Beatles' "Yesterday" or "Eleanor Rigby," the strings are not lush and poignant, but instead recall the music of alienation of the Second Viennese School, specifically the string quartets of Anton Webern. Series of short tonal or atonal bursts and fragments musically replicate the gesticulations of the devilish fiend as they quickly and steadily become ominous rather than comical, serving as a metaphor of the fascist tyrant and the inevitable disaster of the fascist State.

In his criticism of anti-fascist works, Bertolt Brecht's play *Arturo Ui* and Charlie Chaplin's film *The Great Dictator*, Adorno wrote "The buffoonery of fascism … was at the same time also its ultimate horror."[7] For all of Frank Zappa's denunciations of the implicit and explicit authoritarianism of American life while his true commitment was to market capitalism, the problem, as Adorno put it with Brecht and Chaplin, is once comedy supplants horror "and a few sorry greengrocers are mocked [while] key positions of economic power are actually at issue, the attack misfires…. For the sake of political commitment, political reality is trivialized: which then reduces the political effect."[8] On "No One Is There" the image of the dancing demon-as-fascist dictator negates any comedy and instead becomes horrifying through the unsettling musical and vocal performance.

*TMI*'s penultimate song "Frozen Warnings" also uses a viola section as the musical backing, but instead of the stop-start splinters in "No One Is There" they provide dissonant drones and monotonal arpeggios. Lyrically, the song describes a cold, still world of fixed borders which, in the context of the Cold War, allude to the separation of Western and Eastern Europe by the metaphorical Iron Curtain. However, the violas do not simply suggest a landscape of uncrossable geographic boundaries, but the distant sound of air raid sirens and the "frozen warning" as the interminable wait between the launch of nuclear missiles and the advent of nuclear holocaust, the moment of "becoming-World War III." From this reading, the concluding track "Evening of Light" forms a medley with "Frozen Warnings." Recalling "All Tomorrow's Parties" from *VU and Nico*, "Evening of Light" is propelled by a monotonal, eight-note pulse on two pianos treated to have percussive

sounds resembling harpsichords. However, unlike the psychedelic irony of "ATP," the piano pulse becomes infused with a droning, buzzing noise and sudden, sporadic punctuations of distorted bowed electric bass, acoustic viola screeches, and the thuds of what might be termed "fuzz tympani" while the apocalyptic lyrics describe time itself reaching its endpoint, night skies saturated in light, and a desolate winter landscape: the nuclear clock as it reaches midnight, the blinding light of nuclear explosions, and a resulting world engulfed in a nuclear winter. The becoming-World War III of "Frozen Warnings" becomes World War III actualized in "Evening of Light."[9]

Lester Bangs wrote, "I think that *The Marble Index* is the greatest piece of 'avant-garde classical' 'serious' music of the last half of the 20th century so far…. I don't know if I would classify it as oppressive or depressing, but I do know that *The Marble Index* scares the shit out of me."[10] Here Bangs raised two key points. One is his classification of *TMI* as "avant-garde classical" music, although whether it bests works by Gryögy Ligeti, Krzysztof Penderecki, or Iannis Xenakis can be left open to debate. As touched on, the issue is that as an avant-rock album, *TMI* all but jettisons the rock save for brief and sporadic use of electric guitar or bass to produce noise rather than riffs. As a linkage of mass music and theoretical music, *TMI* uses the pop song format (i.e., verse-chorus structures, three-five minute songs, the vocal hooks) and the dissonance, minimalism, noise, and instrumentation utilized by serious modern classical music. *TMI* is classified as rock insofar as Nico's product is found in the rock section rather than the classical section of a given record store.[11] To this extent, *TMI* can be heard as representing a high-modernist moment of rock just as effectively as *Sgt. Pepper*, and does so because *TMI* draws extensively from modernist/postmodernist culture and very little from American roots music. In other words, in *TMI* one hears the influence of Webern or Stockhausen; one does not hear Muddy Waters or Hank Williams.

The other is Bang's succinct assessment of the affect produced by *TMI* as "scaring the shit out of him." Released in November 1968, the same month as *The White Album*, *TMI* was a far bleaker document of counterculture decline. While *The White Album* utilized parody as a response to 1968, *TMI* was an utterly grim rejection of the better and psychedelic tomorrow

posited by *Sgt. Pepper*. *TMI* represented a cryptic, monochromatic, unchanging—and unchangeable—Post-World War II modern world reeling from the Third Reich and the Holocaust in which new fascists would emerge and World War III, the final disaster of modernity, seemed an inevitable certainly.[12] Adorno remarked that "Kafka's prose or Beckett's plays … have an effect by comparison with which officially committed works look like pantomime. Kafka and Beckett arouse the fear which existentialism merely talks about."[13] Whereas Frank Zappa draws comparisons to Dada and Brecht, in this context Zappa's referencing of Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" on "The Chrome Plated Megaphone of Destiny" (*We're Only in It for the Money*) proves spurious. In "CPMD" there is no critique of the damage inflicted on masses by modern society and its machinations, but simply the glee of Zappa musically torturing his audience as so many fools. On the other hand, like Kafka and Beckett *The Marble Index* expresses alienation through abject terror rather than strained comedy.

## ***Rock and Roll:*** **Loaded**

After being dropped by MGM, the Velvets moved to Atlantic Records and released *Loaded* (1970) as a further move towards straightforward rock; the title was reportedly taken from Atlantic's request that the Velvets make an album "loaded with hits."[14] While credited on the back cover, Moe Tucker was pregnant and did not perform on the album, effectively reducing the original line-up to Reed and Morrison, although Yule recounted that Morrison "became discouraged very early on because he felt like I had too much influence on it, he felt basically, sort of cut out…. It sort of devolved into the Lou and Doug recreational recording."[15] Drums were variously supplied by Doug Yule, his teenage brother Billy Yule, recording engineer Adrian Barber, and session musician Tommy Castrano. As a result, the drumming on *Loaded* is far more conventional as far as maintaining a beat with requisite transitional rolls and occasional flashy fills as opposed to Tucker's minimalist, metronomic style of timekeeping. Moreover, Doug Yule sang lead vocals on four of the songs instead of the more distinctive Reed. The reasons were as much pragmatic as artistic. Reed's voice was

fatigued after months of touring and the recording sessions for *Loaded* coincided with an extended residency as the famed New York City nightclub Max's Kansas City from late June to late August, playing a minimum of two sets five nights a week. With Tucker on maternity leave, Billy Yule took over the drums for the Max's Kansas City run, and his style might charitably be called animated as far as his reliance on sometimes obtrusive fills and rolls over Tucker's less is more approach. As Ron Jovanovic cogently pointed out, "The Velvets were no longer an avant-garde band, but more of a bar or club band."[16]

However, with the bulk of *Loaded*'s recording completed, Reed decided to leave the band on August 23, 1970—effective immediately with his last show being fortuitously recorded and subsequently released in 1972 as *Live at Max's Kansas City*. In an interview with *Creem* (November 1987), Reed recounted his decision owed to Steve Sesnick, who replaced Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey as the band's management in 1967. "[Sesnick] was a really bad person, trying to divide everyone, telling one person one thing, telling another person something else, and pitting people against each other starting with John and me, and then working its way down to the rest of the band…. I quit in the middle of *Loaded* because I couldn't stand it anymore." Doug Yule concurred that "Lou put a great deal of trust in [Sesnick]. During that summer Steve decided Lou was unmanageable, so he began to look to me because I was young and easily handled. He had me believing I would be the next Paul McCartney. He told Lou he was through with him."[17] Reed later claimed that *Loaded* was remixed and reedited after his departure, a claim Yule flatly denied; more specifically, Yule contended Reed did the all the studio edits and modifications of songs that were later restored on *Peel Slowly and See*. Reed was also particularly rankled at *Loaded*'s back cover. The photo was of an empty recording studio save Doug Yule playing piano, Reed was listed third on the line-up behind Yule and Morrison, and all three were credited for "lyrics and song composition."[18]

*Loaded*'s songs include "Who Loves the Sun," competent pop-rock comparable to the Beatles and more specifically George Harrison's "Here Comes the Sun" (*Abbey Road*), although one could give the Velvets the benefit of the doubt and suggest the cliché backing vocals and strained

lyrics are ironic if not outright parody of sunshine pop. Similarly, "New Age" was a caustic as opposed to bittersweet ballad that recalled John Lennon. Yule sang lead on both songs. Considering the Velvets' early professed abhorrence for all things West Coast, the up-tempo "Lonesome Cowboy Bill" and the album's concluding ballad "Oh! Sweet Nuthin'" better compared to the country-rock of the Flying Burrito Brothers or the Grateful Dead than a band that previously produced songs like "Heroin" and "The Gift" yet alone "European Son" and "Sister Ray."

Much of *Loaded*'s stature rests on two of Reed's best-known songs, "Sweet Jane" and "Rock and Roll," and as the Velvets rebranded themselves as a commercial rock band, the lyrics of both songs celebrate traditional rock music.[19] "Sweet Jane" is anchored by a two-bar D-A-G-B-A guitar riff that repeats throughout much of the mid-tempo song, serving as both the verse and chorus section; it is sung by Reed in his trademark style of a half-speaking/half-singing monotone with cadences influenced by Beat poetry recitation. Lyrically, "Sweet Jane" is about a couple named Jack and Jane. They have abandoned the wild days of their youth in favor of middle-class life with white-collar jobs, children, and spending nights listening to classical music on the radio. Yet the lyrics are ambiguous, in particular the shifts between first person and third person pronouns, becoming unclear at what points Reed transitions from subjective persona (the voice of Jack) to an objective narrator to ironic commentator in the song. In "Sweet Jane," this ambiguity becomes tied to a melancholy in the song, suggesting Jack remains nostalgic for his youth and a love of rock and roll. It is not so much he has *settled into* a square lifestyle but *settled for* it. At one level, the repetition of the title in the chorus can be heard as a simple expression of Jack's enjoyment of a tranquil life with his wife; at another, the chorus becomes the inescapable memory of his youth defined by the freedom and rock and roll. In this way, the song concludes with the repeated chorus as fuzz bass begins punctuating the one of each bar (D and G), the backing vocals become more strident, and the song fades out, with the memory lingering even after the song ends. However, it is only in these final moments when an element of noise begins to permeate "Sweet Jane" that the song fades out as if to discontinue, or at least contain, any noise that could fully develop.

While Reed described “Rock and Roll” as autobiographical, the song was also written in the third person. A young, disaffected woman named Jenny finds no pleasure in mass culture or consumerism. When she discovers rock and roll listening to the radio, it is not so much a life-changing but a *live-saving* moment in her life. Indeed, listening to rock music gives her a reason to exist in modern society, and rock music as an expression of social alienation becoming the antidote for individual alienation. While a simplified breakdown of the structure, the song is simple rock and roll with a four-bar C-A♯-F-C pattern in the verses and a two-bar C-F alteration in the chorus. As with “Sweet Jane,” Reed sings in his patented deadpan monotone, at times interjecting brief comments while he sings. Reed also blurts “Here she comes now!” just before his short guitar solo (2:10–2:25) that recalls the *WL/WH* medley of “Here She Comes Now” and “I Heard Here Call My Name” (discussed last chapter). At approximately 3:30, the song briefly stops before a coda of the C-F chorus ensues that builds to a crescendo of crashing guitar chords and copious drums rolls akin to the Who. However, like the fuzz bass as the moment “noise” briefly emerges in “Sweet Jane,” when Reed begins a more dissonant guitar solo, the song quickly and abruptly fades out seconds after the solo begins in order to negate the intrusion of potential noise.

This is not at all suggesting *The Velvet Underground* and *Loaded* are bad albums, but pointing out the degree they were a considerable departure from *The Velvet Underground and Nico* and especially *White Light/White Heat*.[20] More specifically, as far as avant-garde/experimental music is being defined in this project, except for “The Murder Mystery” the final two Velvet Underground albums offered little in this area, and it was not coincidental this shift followed in the wake of Cale’s ouster from the band. By 1970, the Velvet’s avant-rock project was ultimately taken up by Nico and Cale outside the Velvets.

# Conclusion

## *The Avant-Garde Goes Pop*

In tracing the intersections of the avant-garde, counterculture, and popular culture through case studies of the Beatles, Frank Zappa, and the Velvet Underground in the late 1960s, the following sections are offered as concluding summations and assessments as far as the ways these performers negotiated these tensions, and the stakes they raised in the process. However, they are not intended as the final word, but topic points that can be used for further discussion on the issues presented.

**Music.** In discussing the emergence of avant-rock in the late 1960s, and the convergence of mass music and theoretical music (i.e., popular music and avant-garde/experimental music), it becomes necessary to examine *how and why* these performers utilized dissonance and noise for musical and social effect. The Beatles were the biggest rock stars in the world when they began to incorporate theoretical music into mass music. The tension that developed was the degree the avant-garde was utilized by McCartney for purposes of artistic growth and cultural sophistication (*Sgt. Pepper*) versus John Lennon's desire for pure expression and cultural confrontation (his collaborations with Yoko Ono). In contrast, Frank Zappa was an unknown avant-gardist who moved into popular music as an economic necessity. Zappa's parodic use and abuse of popular music housed avant-garde/experimental music for purposes of artistic difficulty and cultural opposition while also becoming a marketable product. With the Velvets, the tension was manifest in a link-up of popular music represented by Lou Reed and avant-garde/experimental music represented by John Cale—a tension that eventually imploded the band. While the Beatles used theoretical music to further mass music, and Zappa mass music to further theoretical music, the evolution of the Velvets increasingly entailed abandoning theoretical music altogether, signified by John Cale's ouster from the band.

**Lyrics.** Particularly after Bob Dylan moved from folk into the rock music market ca. 1965, rock lyrics were increasingly required to offer more than predictable rhymes schemes about falling in or out of love. In the case of the Beatles, song lyrics ranged from the standard love song, whimsical vignettes, nostalgic odes, parodic spoofs, obscure verses, and agitprop, with John Lennon supplying the more politically minded lyrics. While Frank Zappa viewed lyrics as a necessary compromise as far as the popular music marketplace, the inventive and vulgarity drew inspiration from social satirists and stand-up comedians, specifically Lenny Bruce; moreover, the emphasis on sardonic, sophomoric, and frequently sexist social commentary soon reached a point where shock value became the end as opposed to the means. In contrast, Lou Reed's lyrics for the Velvet Underground were influenced by the likes of William S. Burroughs, Raymond Chandler, and Hubert Selby, Jr. Rather than social commentary and political lyrics as polemical and topical statements, Reed's lyrics ironically essayed cultural, social, and even moral transgression through unflinching accounts of bohemian urban life, drug abuse and addiction, and alterative sexuality.

**The Studio.** The Beatles and Frank Zappa were among the first rock musicians to use the studio as a compositional tool rather than a stage with recording equipment to capture song performance as is. These methods included overdubs, electronic effects, tape editing, session musicians, non-traditional and unconventional rock instrumentation, non-musical sounds, and combining segmented performances into individual and/or interconnected songs. While the Beatles attempted to deemphasize studio composition by the end of their career (whether they actually did so is another matter), Zappa remained one of rock's foremost practitioners of studio composition in constructing montages of musical and non-musical material. In contrast, while the Velvets did not eschew studio production as far as occasional overdubs, adding effects, and using tape editing to manipulate songs, the Velvets primarily used the studio in a traditionalist way and capturing the songs in live performances rather than producing music around studio constructions.

**Concerts.** The avant-garde of the Beatles in this regard was the rejection of the concert altogether, and the decision to use television as the primary means of performing songs for a mass audience through increasingly

unconventional promotional films (i.e., music videos). The colossal failure of *Magical Mystery Tour* largely ended that approach in favor of straightforward live performance promotional films. With the Mothers of Invention, Zappa converted the rock concert into a Dada anti-concert, not only denying the audience their money's worth but making them objects of derision. As part of the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, the Velvets pioneered the multi-media concert as a form of Theater of Cruelty, an assault of noise, lights, films, and shocking dance and performance pieces. However, as multi-media concerts became modus operandi, particularly the light shows that became synonymous with the late 1960s rock bands (i.e., Pink Floyd, the Grateful Dead), the Velvets abandoned the avant-garde elements of concert performance as well as their music.

**The Record Industry.** The Beatles established Apple Corps—and as its music branch, Apple Records—as what Paul McCartney termed "Western Communism." As an idealistic alternative to the culture industry, Apple Corps was intended to ferment cultural production and expand cultural distribution to numerous artists and curious audiences in a variety of mediums. In theory, Apple Corps was a system designed to provide a potentially limitless amount of cultural supply from the popular to the avant-garde for cultural consumers under the auspices of the Beatles' capital. In practice, financial realties made the Apple Corps project untenable. As important, Apple Records became, for lack of a better term, a vanity label for John Lennon and Yoko Ono to pursue avant-garde artistic projects and global political activism funded by the Beatles' revenue while he increasingly distanced himself from the band.

In a 1987 interview on MTV's music show *The Cutting Edge*, Frank Zappa noted when major record companies began releasing avant-rock albums in the late 1960s many were run by "cigar-chomping old guys" who had little knowledge of the music and simply released records in order to see what sold; as "hip young" executives assumed greater control in the industry, a self-censorship developed as far as who was signed, what records were released, and which records got promoted predicated on executives' own musical bias and what brands of rock music *they* felt consumers *should* buy.[1] Zappa eventually established Bizarre Productions as a means to maintain artistic and financial control over his and other performer's

products, allow him to release otherwise unreleasable avant-rock albums, and execute a critique of mass culture through the culture industry as well as through his music and lyrics. As stressed, the recurring problem of Zappa's critique was his emphasis on blaming and chastising the music consumer who simply preferred popular music over more esoteric musical product.

The Velvets typified the problem of an uncommercial band working in traditional constructs of the major record company, and the issues they encountered became part of the myths constructed around the band as oppositional culture. Moreover, the Velvets emerged at a time when the standard practice was singing to major labels rather than working through independent labels (both the Beatles and Zappa had distribution deals with major labels for Apple Records and Bizarre/Straight Records). One can only speculate what might have transpired had Velvets and Warhol done *The Velvet Underground and Nico* as an independent record in a time when this approach was a viable alternative (i.e., the 1970s and subsequent decades with the rise of major independent labels like Virgin, Stiff, Rough Trade, SST, Sub Pop, etc.).

**Counterculture Politics.** With *Sgt. Pepper*, the Beatles rebranded themselves from their international pop star mop-top image into, if not necessarily intended on their part, global ambassadors for the counterculture. As the Beatles were elevated for that status, and as the late 1960s became increasingly volatile, the Beatles' were defined around McCartney's perceived musical triviality and political apathy versus Lennon's musical adventurism and political commitment. Put differently, while McCartney was viewed as abdicating the political responsibility foisted on them with *Sgt. Pepper* Lennon ran with the role of counterculture spokesperson. Despite his status as a vociferous anti–Establishment critic, Frank Zappa also became one of the counterculture's harshest internal critics: a position that not only stemmed from Zappa's all-encompassing social satire, but his own practical conservative ideology as it butted heads with hippie peace and love and left-wing idealism. While not overtly political, the Velvets delved into the politics of transgression and took the counterculture's romanticism of sex, drugs, and rock and roll to its extremes, at least early on, musically and lyrically. Not unrelated, these

performers provided representations of the geographic politics of 1960s counterculture. The Beatles stood for a global sense of utopian change and idealism (the criticisms of their more conciliatory songs notwithstanding), Zappa moved from celebrating West Coast freakdom to mocking West Coast pseudo-rebellion, and the Velvet Underground chronicled East Coast counterculture social and sexual politics.

Moreover, the 1960s counterculture sought an alternate revolutionary model that would avoid the repression and rigor of Soviet Communism. As briefly considered in the Introduction, Stuart D. Hobbs contended the end of the avant-garde in the 1960s owed to three interrelated factors: commodification as mass culture, institutional acceptance in academia and the art world, and Cold War politics. In terms of this third issue, Hobbs noted "though alienated from the culture of the Cold War, the politics of the avant-gardists intersected at key points with the ideals of Cold War liberals…. The result was to coopt the avant-garde as one of many style options in a free, pluralistic American society."[2] A nebulous ideology built around ideals of freedom, individualism, liberty, and non-conformity developed that rejected the either-or State alternatives offered by the U.S.A and the U.S.S.R. In this context, William O'Neill argued while orthodox Marxism sought "to re-Stalinize the left, young radicals were turning to glamorous third-world revolutionaries like Che Guevara…. A program that meant assuming the drab style of American proletarians had no charm for them."[3] As rock music, the avant-garde, and the counterculture entered negotiations within the demands and pressures of the record business as part of the culture industry, John Lennon emerged as the radical idealist whose views were best expressed by a song that became synonymous with Lennon, the aptly titled ballad "Imagine" (1971). In contrast, Frank Zappa became the political realist as a vocal critic of both the Establishment and the counterculture, embracing market capitalism and social criticism with equal tenacity. To this extent, both Lennon and Zappa became respective representations of the contradictions of avant-rock and the limits of oppositional culture in capitalist society.

**The Avant-Rock Movement.** While the Beatles, Zappa, and the Velvets—as well as the Plastic Ono Band, Captain Beefheart, and Nico—were pioneers of avant-rock in varying ways and degrees amid counterculture

unrest they were not the only ones. In certain respects, the later Beatles and Zappa could be termed proto-prog as far as harnessing modern classical and other genres usually outside of traditional rock influences, longer and more complicated compositions, interconnected songs as medleys, and studio composition. Pink Floyd, Soft Machine, and United States of America could be added to a list of proto-prog bands as well. Pink Floyd became known for multi-media concerts featuring extended instrumental improvisations that did not shy away from dissonance and noise (e.g., 1969's *Ummagumma*).[4] Using a keyboard-bass-drum power trio format, Soft Machine was heavily influenced by post–World War II jazz as well as modern classical and experimental music. Soft Machine offered extended and frequently atonal soloing, absurdist lyrics, and Robert Wyatt's conversational, free-flowing vocal style that necessitated numerous key and time signature changes in songs. In a 1969 performance for John Peel's BBC radio show *Top Gear*, Wyatt changed the lyrics of "Moon in June" into a hilarious account of Soft Machine's previous appearance and current performance on *Top Gear*—whether commenting on Mike Ratledge's keyboard playing or the options presented by BBC vending machines. Using a line-up that included synthesizer and electric violin while eschewing the guitar entirely, the United States of America's hybrid sound included elements of psychedelic rock, jazz, Eastern music, and modern classical influences such as Charles Ives.

In this respect, one can include the Nice, arguably the first progressive rock band. Under the leadership of keyboardist Keith Emerson—who later gained rock stardom with Emerson, Lake, and Palmer (ELP)—the Nice combined classical, jazz, folk, and rock music. Released in 1967, the Nice's debut *The Thoughts of Emerlist Davjack* was largely psychedelic rock comparable to early Pink Floyd. An indication of future direction was the instrumental "Rondo," an adaptation of Dave Brubeck's "Blue Rondo à la Turk" played in rollicking 4/4 rather than swing 9/8 that featured Emerson's virtuoso keyboard runs and guitarist Davy O'List's more atonal guitar soling. The Nice's second single was an instrumental cover of "America" from *West Side Story*, again converting the alternating 6/8–3/4 time signatures to a pounding 4/4.[5] In fall of 1968, O'List was dismissed from the band and the Nice became a keyboard-bass-drum trio for the second album *Ars Longa, Vita Brevis* (released November 1968), which featured a

cover of Jean Sibelius ("Intermezzo of the Karelia Suite"). The mostly instrumental 20 minute title track—itself divided into four movements and coda—not only borrowed from Bach's "Allegro" from *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3* but included an orchestral accompaniment. The final record *Five Bridges* (1970) featured the eighteen-minute "Five Bridges Suite" recorded live with an orchestra on October 17, 1969. Composed by Emerson and bassist/vocalist Lee Jackson, "FBS" was a pastiche (read: hodgepodge) of classical, jazz, and rock idioms variously influenced by the work of Dave Brubeck, Aaron Copland, George Gershwin, Duke Ellington, and (at its most adventurous) hints of Ives and Varèse. The album also included live with orchestra versions of the Sibelius piece from *ALVB*, a classical-rock arrangement of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* (Symphony no. 6, 3rd movement), and "Country Pie/Brandenburg Concerto No. 6"—a Bob Dylan cover that incorporated Bach organ lines.

King Crimson's *In the Court of the Crimson Kin*g (1969) did not so much invent but consolidated the progressive rock hybrid style of classical, jazz, English folk, and rock into complex music and enigmatic lyrics, ranging from the jazz-metal of "21st Century Schizoid Man" to the extended free playing on "Moonchild" to the symphonic-pop of the title track. By the early 1970s numerous progressive rock bands emerged—ELP, Yes, Jethro Tull, Genesis, Gentle Giant, Curved Air, and Van der Graaf Generator among them—and while progressive rock was avant-garde in the late 1960s as far as challenging rock traditionalism, by the early 1970s any attempts to integrate the bourgeois culture of canonical classical music into rock were deemed by critics as musically and politically reactionary.[6] Rock journals like *Creem* and *Rolling Stone* savaged progressive rock while Jacques Attali contented, "Popular music and rock have become recuperated, colonized, sanitized … by an implacable ideological and technical recuperation…. Eric Clapton was replaced by Keith Emerson."[7]

Conversely, the Velvets brand of minimalist, ironic (as opposed to parodic) avant-rock was part of a proto-punk/proto-post punk impetus that included other bands. Formed by discharged and disgruntled U.S. Army soldiers in Germany, the Monks' *Black Monk Time* (1966) was pounding garage rock augmented by a banjo used as a rhythmic rather than melodic instrument, atonal organ playing, and political lyrics; moreover, the band adopted

tonsure haircuts, black cassocks, and nooses worn as neckties as their public image.[8] Red Krayola's *The Parable of Arable Land* (1967) interspersed simple but decidedly strange psychedelic rock songs with "Free Form Freak-Out" noise sections spontaneously improvised in the studio by the Familiar Ugly, a large group of their friends (most of them non-musicians).[9] Arguably the band that wrote the template for the punk explosion in the mid–1970s, the Stooges' played minimalist hard rock with maximum aggression on *The Stooges* (1969) and *Funhouse* (1970) while concerts became the site of potentially confrontational and volatile "situations." The MC5's live debut *Kick Out the Jams* (1969) combined garage rock, hard rock, the avant-garde of free jazz, noise elements of aleatory amplifier feedback, and politicized lyrics replete with sermonizing monologs. The result was a turbulent document of the era.

**Postmodernism.** One of the inevitable questions arising around the avant-garde is modernism and postmodernism. In the end, a modernist rock vs. postmodernist rock debate can obscure as much as illuminate the issue. If a tenant of postmodern is the breakdown between high modernist culture and low popular culture, the enterprise of avant-rock can be read as part of post–World War II postmodern as much as criticism seeks to redeem avant-rock—or at least select bands—around the term modernism. Rock music originated as a hybrid form of music, combining the popular music genres of R&B (black music) and country-western (white music) into an emergent cultural form with a youth culture audience. In the 1960s, rock's gestures toward the avant-garde had a paradoxical effect. On one hand, it popularized the avant-garde and expanded the formal boundaries of rock beyond three chords, backbeats, and love song lyrics. At the same time, it was part of rock's drive to become a respectable art form, and as much as the highbrow was incorporated into rock and roll, the upshot was that rock developed cultural capital as a music that could be highbrow in its own right, namely *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

Ultimately, this project is concerned a specific historical era and does not seek assess the present status or predict the future of avant-rock in the twenty-first century. Nonetheless, any assessment should not simply compare an assumed greatness of the past and an equally assumed deficiency of the present. The historical avant-garde—Futurism, Dada,

Surrealism, etc.—emerged out of a global situation reeling from World War I and the Russian Revolution while the neo-avant-garde—Pop Art, Fluxus, the Situationist International, etc.—emerged out of the aftermath of World War II, the Holocaust, the Atomic Bomb, and the advent of the Cold War. Both responded to world that no longer made sense. The difference was that the historical avant-garde movements shared a view that capitalism, liberal democracy, and its myriad representation by bourgeois culture were rejected: Futurism's embrace of fascism, Dada's tendencies towards anarchism and nihilism, or Surrealism's allegiance to Marxism. The neo-avant-garde emerged in the era of Cold War politics had to choose between Western capitalism and liberal democracy versus Eastern Bloc communism. As Michael Gallope argued, "After World War II, a polarized climate of culture and politics between the Communist bloc and the free-market West determined the aesthetic conditions for a literate art music…. Post-war institutions supported avant-garde composers because their musical styles seemed to protect creative autonomy from the twin demons of totalitarian censorship and the profit-hungry culture industry."[10]

The collapse of Soviet Communism and Western capitalism's victory in the Cold War ca. the late 1980s-early 1990s entailed that any negotiations between the avant-garde and popular music, for all intent and purposes, had little option but *détente* with global capitalism. Moreover, the revolution that occurred in the 1990s was the proliferation of information technologies like personal computers and the Internet. The dynamics of cultural production and cultural consumption have drastically changed as far as the amount of culture available. In the case of music, YouTube has not only replaced MTV as the media space for music videos but serves as nothing short of a global music library. In the twenty-first century society, the prefix "post-" has become common: postmodern, postindustrial, postfeminist, post-racial, post-gender, etc. The historical avant-garde is defined around a post–World War I historical context and the neo-avant-garde the post–World War II historical context. Perhaps the twenty-first century has seen the emergence of a post-avant-garde that thankfully did not emerge from a post–World War III historical context. If *Sgt. Pepper* is judged as rock's high-modernist moment of 1967, the Flaming Lips and Miley Cyrus collaborating on a psychedelic-techno cover of "A Day in the Life" in 2014 becomes the postmodern update. If *Sgt. Pepper* can be heard as rock's entry

into postmodernism, the Flaming Lips/Miley Cyrus version of "A Day in the Life" suggests, for lack of a better term, "post-postmodernism."

As the avant-garde becomes more assimilated into popular culture, which is not necessarily saying appropriated by mass culture, perhaps the issue is reassessing the meaning of the term avant-garde itself rather than pining for an authentic avant-garde seemingly derived from modernism and seemingly at odds with the cultural market. The irony is that the "death of the avant-garde" rallying cry, once aimed against the avant-garde of the 1960s, is now being taken up by the generation who grew up on *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and *The Velvet Underground and Nico* against a younger generation of musical performers and consumers. Defending the neo-avant-garde and emerging counterculture, in 1965 Susan Sontag argued

> It reflects a new, more open way of looking at the world and at things in the world, our world. It does mean the renunciation of all standards: there is plenty of stupid popular music, as well as inferior and pretentious "avant-garde" paintings, film, and music. The point is that there are new standards…. The new standard is defiantly pluralistic; it is dedicated to an excruciating seriousness and to fun and wit and nostalgia…. A painting by Jasper Johns, a film by Jean-Luc Godard, and the personalities and music of the Beatles are all equally accessible.[11]

In certain respects, Sontag's assessment can be applied fifty years later in 2015 and the changing new standards of culture and politics. Ultimately, the issue is working towards a historical as well as aesthetic approach to the term avant-garde, and ascertaining what ways Lou Reed and Lady Gaga—or, for that matter, John Lennon and Kanye West and Frank Zappa and Miley Cyrus—are and are not, avant-garde in vastly different cultural, historical, and political eras as well as new standards in potential link-ups of mass music and theoretical music.

# Discography

The following is a *selective* listing of albums by the performers discussed in this book. It also includes several recordings by performers not discussed but nonetheless relevant as far as the historical development of "avant-rock" from 1966–1970 (if not avant-rock *per se*). Albums are listed chronologically under the year of their recording or original release; they have since been reissued by a variety of record companies in both LP and CD format. This discography is limited to rock bands and does not include records in the genres of free jazz, modern classical, electronic music, etc. It also does not include bootleg recordings or singles. Bands are listed by the name they are best-known by (e.g., Pink Floyd and Soft Machine eventually dropped "The" from their names, Captain Beefheart's band was later changed from "His Magic Band" to "the Magic Band," the GTOs were officially "GTO's," etc.).

***1966***

The Beatles, *Revolver*

The Beach Boys, *Pet Sounds*

The Fugs, *The Fugs First Album*

_____, *The Fugs*

The Monks, *Black Monk Time*

The Mothers of Invention, *Freak Out!*

13th Floor Elevators, *The Psychedelic Sounds of the 13th Floor Elevators*

***1967***

The Beatles, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*

_____, *Magical Mystery Tour* (U.S. album version)

Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band, *Safe as Milk*

The Doors, *The Doors*

The Jimi Hendrix Experience, *Axis: Bold as Love*

Love, *Forever Changes*

The Moody Blues, *Days of Future Passed*

The Mothers of Invention, *Absolutely Free*

The Nice, *Thoughts of Emerlist Davjack*

Pink Floyd, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*

Red Krayola, *The Parable of Arable Land*

13th Floor Elevators, *Easter Everywhere*

The Velvet Underground, *The Velvet Underground and Nico*

Frank Zappa, *Lumpy Gravy* (Capitol Records version)

***1968***

The Beatles, *The Beatles* (a.k.a. *The White Album*)

Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band, *Strictly Personal*

Family, *Music in a Doll's House*

John Lennon and Yoko Ono, *Unfinished Music No. 1: Two Virgins*

The Mothers of Invention, *We're Only in It for the Money*

The Nice, *Ars Longa, Vita Brevis*

Nico, *The Marble Index*

Pink Floyd, *A Saucerful of Secrets*

The Pretty Things, *S.F. Sorrow*

Red Krayola, *God Bless the Red Krayola and All Who Sail with It*

Silver Apples, *Silver Apples*

Soft Machine, *The Soft Machine*

The United States of America, *The United States of America*

The Velvet Underground, *White Light/White Heat*

The Who, *Tommy*

Wild Man Fischer, *An Evening with Wild Man Fischer*

Frank Zappa, *Lumpy Gravy* (Verve Records version)

***1969***

The Beatles, *Abbey Road*

Tim Buckley, *Blue Afternoon*

Can, *Monster Movie*

Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band, *Trout Mask Replica*

The Grateful Dead, *Live/Dead*

GTOs (Girls Together Outrageously), *Permanent Damage*

King Crimson, *In the Court of the Crimson King*

John Lennon and Yoko Ono, *Unfinished Music No. 2: Life with the Lions*

_____, *Wedding Album*

MC5, *Kick Out the Jams*

The Mothers of Invention, *Uncle Meat*

Pink Floyd, *More*

_____, *Ummagumma*

Plastic Ono Band, *Live Peace in Toronto 1969*

The Shaggs, *Philosophy of the World*

Silver Apples, *Contact*

Soft Machine, *Volume Two*

The Stooges, *The Stooges*

The Velvet Underground, *The Velvet Underground*

Frank Zappa, *Hot Rats*

***1970***

Amon Düül II, *Yeti*

The Beatles, *Let It Be*

Tim Buckley, *Lorca*

_____, *Starsailor*

Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band, *Lick My Decals Off, Baby*

Curved Air, *Air Conditioning*

Egg, *Egg*

Emerson, Lake & Palmer, *Emerson, Lake & Palmer*

Gentle Giant, *Gentle Giant*

Magma, *Magma* (a.k.a. *Kobaïa*)

The Mothers of Invention, *Burnt Weeny Sandwich*

_____, *Weasels Ripped My Flesh*

The Nice, *Five Bridges*

Nico, *Desertshore*

Yoko Ono, *Yoko Ono/Plastic Ono Band*

Pink Floyd, *Atom Heart Mother*

Soft Machine, *Third*

The Stooges, *Funhouse*

Van der Graaf Generator, *The Least We Can Do Is Wave to Each Other*

_____, *H to He Who Am the Only One*

The Velvet Underground, *Loaded*

Frank Zappa, *Chunga's Revenge*

### ***Retrospectives***

Pink Floyd, *Relics* (recorded 1967–9; released 1971)

Soft Machine, *The Peel Sessions* (recorded 1969–71; released 1990)

The Velvet Underground, *Peel Slowly and See* (recorded 1965–70; released 1995)

# Chapter Notes

## *Introduction*

1. Todd Leopold, "Appreciation: Lou Reed, the Minimalist God." *CNN* (October 27, 2013). Archived at: http://www.cnn.com/2013/10/27/showbiz/lou-reed-appreciation/. Accessed: July 29, 2014. Moreover, CNN's TV news coverage of Reed's death featuring CNN's Don Lemon and rock critic Anthony DeCurtis discussing Reed's life and work included Lemon noting Reed's avant-garde credentials in reference to *Metal Machine Music* (1975), a double album of guitar feedback. To be sure, *MMM* was Reed's most determinedly avant-garde/experimental music gesture, although with the exception of Lester Bangs *MMM* was almost universally reviled by rock critics and withdrawn by RCA within a month after its release after copies were returned in droves by purchasers and retailers –some believing the record pressing was simply defective. *MMM* has since assumed a "cult classic" status in rock music but one could argue this is an extension of Reed's cultural capital rather than *MMM* being recognized as a pivotal avant-rock record (e.g., *Trout Mask Replica* or *The Marble Index*)—in other words, who is on the cover rather than what is on the record.

2. "Lou Reed, 1943–2013: Inside the New Issue of *Rolling Stone*." Archived at: http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/lou-reed-1942–2013-inside-the-new-issue-of-rolling-stone-20131106. Accessed: July 29, 2014.

3. Suzanne Moore, "Postmodernism Killed the Avant-Garde. Lady Gaga is No Substitute for Lou Reed," *The Guardian* October 30, 2013). Archived at: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/30/postmodernism-avant-garde-lady-gaga-lou-reed-x-factor. Accessed: July 27, 2014.

4. As quoted in Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, NC: Duke

University Press, 1997), 121.

5. *Five Faces of Modernity,* 120–1.

6. See Stuart D. Hobbs, *The End of the American Avant-Garde* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), especially 15–6 and Chapters 6–8.

7. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 58. Emphasis original.

8. William L. O'Neill, *Coming Apart: An Informal History of America in the 1960s* (New York: Times, 1971), 201–2. For a defense of the Happening, see Susan Sontag, "Happenings: An Art of Radical Juxtaposition" in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Anchor, 1990). Sontag argued the Happenings were an extension of Surrealism and Antonin Artaud's "Theater of Cruelty" theories and the most successful Happenings were the ones that made the conditions of reception extremely difficult for the audience through noise production, disorientating lights, multiple events occurring at once, etc. (265). As discussed in Part Three, the Exploding Plastic Inevitable operated along these lines as well.

9. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 1.

10. See Kenneth Gloag, *Postmodernism and Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 44–6. Gloag suggests rock music's evolution is not one of easily classifiable decade by decade "historical breaks" and early rock of the 1950s can be seen has exhibiting "postmodern" characteristics —well before rock ostensibly became "postmodern" in the 1970s. In this respect, early rock instrumentals can be analyzed as examples of "avant-rock" as far as the disconcerting use of dissonance and noise, such as Johnny "Guitar" Watson's "Space Guitar" (1954) or Link Wray's "Rumble" (1958).

11. Here I am referring to only performers that are categorized as "rock" within the specious division between "rock" and "pop." As far as pop, one could add Madonna, Lady Gaga, Antony Hegarty, even Miley Cyrus.

12. Moore, “Postmodernism,” *op. cit.*

13. See Paul Hegarty, *Noise/Music: A History* (New York: Continuum, 2008), Chapter 1, especially 11–12. Also recommended is Joanna Demers, *Listening Through the Noise: The Aesthetics of Experimental Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), Introduction, especially 5–9.

14. The Shaggs were a trio of teenage sisters from rural New Hampshire consisting of Dorothy “Dot” Wiggins (lead guitar, vocals), Betty Wiggins (rhythm guitar, vocals) and Helen Wiggins (drums). Following a psychic’s prediction his daughters were destined for popular music stardom, Austin Wiggins insisted they form a band, write songs, and record an album despite a complete lack of musical “skill” in the conventional sense. In fact, the Shaggs developed an idiosyncratic musical “coherence” in their songs because of (rather than despite of) the out-of-tune guitars, arrhythmic chord strumming, the lagging backbeat that placed the snare at various points in a given measure, an absence of any recognizable key or time signatures, and singing that dragged the jumbled music in its wake with little relationship to it. Reportedly during the recording of *Philosophy of the World*, the band stopped one song midway through and the recording engineers inquired as to why: they were informed that someone made a mistake and the band had to start over. Captain Beefheart’s *Trout Mask Replica* becomes the inevitable comparison, with the Shaggs unintentionally adopting a harmolodic approach to pop and folk rather than an intentionally harmolodic approach to blues and jazz.

15. Hegarty, 12. Emphasis original.

16. See Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” trans. Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 224–5.

17. Hubert van den Berg, “On the Historiographic Distinction between Historical and Neo-Avant-Garde,” in *Avant-Garde/Neo-Avant-Garde*, ed. Dietrich Scheunemann (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2005), 64.

18. Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 117.

19. This study omits *Squeeze* (1973). Beyond falling outside the timespan of this project, it was effectively a Doug Yule solo album but, through various managerial and record label maneuverings, released as a "Velvet Underground" album. In fact, Yule played all the instruments on the album save drums, which were played by Ian Paice (Deep Purple) and saxophone (credited to "Malcolm" and reportedly Malcolm Duncan from the Average White Band).

20. However, Andrew Goodwin and Greil Marcus (among others) offered critical views that 1970s punk and post-punk was not the advent of postmodernism into rock (i.e., Jameson) but part of rock's "modernist" era. See Goodwin's response to Jameson in Chapter 1; see also Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) in which Marcus discussed punk through its affinity to avant-garde movements such as Dada and the Situationist International.

21. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 2.

22. As quoted in Kevin Courrier, *Trout Mask Replica*, no. 44 in the *33 1/3* series (New York: Continuum, 2007), 61. Jameson situated the work of Philip Glass and Terry Riley as a "synthesis of classical and 'popular' styles" as a *postmodern* form of modern classical whereas the Beatles as a synthesis of classical and popular styles becomes rock music's "high-modernist moment." Extrapolating from this categorization, Terry Riley's "In C" becomes an example of postmodern classical while the Beatles' "A Day in the Life" becomes an example of modernist rock. Yet Frank Zappa's brand of rock music as another example of a calculated synthesis of classical and popular styles (i.e., Varèse and Stravinsky merged with doo-wop, jazz, and rock) is frequently castigated as postmodernist whereas the Velvet Underground harnessed rock with postmodern avant-garde influences (e.g., Andy Warhol, Ornette Coleman, LaMonte Young) yet becomes critically aligned with modernism.

***Chapter 1***

1. As quoted in Barry Miles, *Paul McCartney: Many Years from Now* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 303–4, 306 (henceforth referenced as Miles, *Many Years from Now*).

2. *Abbey Road* barely missed the Top Ten, coming in at #14, although *Rolling Stone* was more ambivalent towards the album when first released, running two reviews in the same issue (November 15, 1969), with John Mendelsohn offering a rave review and Ed Ward's companion piece panning the album. Mendelsohn's review is the only one that now appears on *Rolling Stone*'s official website.

3. A live performance of "Yesterday" by the Beatles is archived at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRen3jDqViI. Accessed: February 7, 2015. Filmed in Germany ca. 1965, the band version offers a distinct contrast to the studio version. It also demonstrates the growing problems the band was facing in concert surrounded by an imposing ring of security personnel in ties while the audience punctuated the ballad with screams.

4. See my own *The Rock Cover Song: Culture, History, Politics* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014), 53–4.

5. The Jam's "Start!" (1980) liberally "borrowed" the main riff from "Taxman."

6. Walter Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians: From Revolver Through the Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 57.

7. "Got to Get You into My Life" made the U.S. Top Ten in 1976 when it was released as the single from the Beatles' anthology *Rock 'n' Roll Music*. Despite being recorded a decade earlier, one factor in the song's success was that it sounded remarkably similar to the recorded product of Wings, McCartney's band in the 1970s, who were at the peak of their popularity at the time (e.g., "Listen to What the Man Said").

8. Peter Ames Carlin, *Paul McCartney: A Life* (New York: Touchstone, 2009), 131.

9. This new method of production on *Sgt. Pepper* also changed the group dynamic. Harrison admitted he began losing his enthusiasm and becoming estranged from the Beatles as early as 1966, especially after the arduous final concert tour, his first sojourn to India, and the ongoing domination of the band by Lennon and especially McCartney—a situation evidenced by McCartney occasionally assuming lead guitar duties and playing the solos on "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," and "Good Morning Good Morning" (McCartney also overdubbed the guitar solo on "Taxman"). Harrison's only songwriting contribution to *Sgt. Pepper* was "Within You Without You" and recorded without the other Beatles. Instead, the song employed Indian musicians (cf. "Love You To" from *Revolver*) as well as string section arranged by George Martin paring pizzicato violins with the sitar and bowed cellos with the drones of tamboura and dilruba. One might say "Within You Without You" was the Eastern-Western music hybrid of "Yesterday." Both Harrison and Starr were not enamored with the protracted studio composition of piecemeal overdubbing and editing. Wryly noting he ultimately learned more about playing chess than playing music during the recording of *Sgt. Pepper*, Starr was uncomfortable with overdubbing drums on existing basic tracks—although it did afford him the opportunity to venture into less restricted timekeeping—and his role effectively becoming a studio "percussionist" rather than "drummer" (issues that reached a head when Starr briefly quit the band during the arduous *White Album* sessions). See Carlin, 141–2.

10. Joe Harvard, *The Velvet Underground and Nico,* no. 11 in the *33 1/3* series (New York: Continuum, 2008), 90. Emphasis added.

11. For instance, if one listens to contemporary recordings by Bob Dylan—*Highway 61 Revisited* (1965) and *Blonde on Blonde* (1966)—the performances do not simply have an element of "spontaneity" but could be criticized as "sloppy" as far as the fluctuations in tempos, awkward transitions, and Dylan's singing occasionally not in synch with the band. This should not be interpreted as suggesting this makes Dylan's albums "bad records."

12. *Noise/Music: A History*, 77. Rock criticism is not especially consistent in this regard. The Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* (1966), a record that highly

influenced *Sgt. Pepper* and was runner up to *Sgt. Pepper* in Rolling Stone's "500 Greatest Albums" poll, epitomizes the studio album. Brian Wilson wrote the album and much of it was performed by session musicians with the rest of the Beach Boys contributing vocals and sporadic instrumentation. It took months to complete, with extensive takes and overdubs on each song.

13. In this respect, a concept album can be classified as part of reconfiguring public and music consumer perceptions of the performer stylistically and/or politically: in short, rebranding. Many of David Bowie's albums in the 1970s were concept albums as far as creating new public personas ranging from his "Ziggy Stardust" period during the rise of glam rock in the early 1970s to his "Thin White Duke" ersatz-soul phase during the disco era to his somber "Berlin Trilogy" albums coinciding with post-punk. In more recent examples, Madonna's *American Life* (2003) was a concept album rebranding Madonna from her "Material Girl" Reagan-era origins to a politically committed "oppositional" pop star; the album cover was a portrait of Madonna referencing the iconic photo of Che Guevara. Miley Cyrus' *Bangerz* (2014) was also a concept album rebranding Cyrus from her "Hannah Montana" role as teen-pop star to an "adult" performer with an image built around androgyny, LGBT rights, and recreational drug use.

14. As quoted in Carlin, 135. Emphasis added.

15. Allen F. Moore, *The Beatles: Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 61.

16. As quoted in Carlin, 122–3; see also 123–6.

17. See Miles, *Many Years From Now*, 308–9. McCartney lobbied for the "song" to be released on *Anthology 2* (1996) but the other Beatles, specifically George Harrison, rejected the idea.

18. The arrangement was done by record industry veteran Mike Leander as George Martin was unavailable due to session commitments with singer Cilla Black. Impatient to get the arrangement completed, an annoyed McCartney contacted Leander, a move which in turn greatly bothered

Martin although he used Leander's arrangement for the recording. See Miles, *Many Years from Now*, 316–7; see also Carlin, 142.

19. William M. Northcutt, "The Spectacle of Alienation: Death, Loss, and the Crowd in *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*," *in Reading the Beatles: Cultural Studies, Literary Criticism, and the Fab Four*, ed. Kenneth Womack (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 138.

20. David Wragg points to Frank Zappa's song "Teenage Prostitute" (1982) as one that "appears to update the cloying sentimentality of 'She's Leaving Home'" ["'Or Any Art at All?': Frank Zappa Meets Critical Theory," *Popular Music* vol. 20, no.2 (2001): 212.] Rather than waltz time harp and lilting strings, "Teenage Prostitute" is a typical Zappa song with a frenetic and parodic juxtaposition of operatic vocals, heavy metal guitar riffing, cartoon soundtrack music, and crude lyrics.

21. This strategy of the quarter-note snare beat was used extensively by Pink Floyd drummer Nick Mason on the debut album *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* (1967) as a means to rhythmically "anchor" the songs. Syd Barrett's unorthodox song structures stemmed from the vocal melody vocal lines determining the notes and the meter, necessitating abrupt chord and time signatures changes. David Gilmour recounted, "Syd used to sing a lyric [until] he finished and then change. There are old songs of Syd's in which you can't tell how many beats are in the bar—drummers used to have a hell of a time getting through those things" [as quoted in Edward Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 72]. In "Lucifer Sam," Mason plays a 4/4 backbeat in the songs instrumental riff that that suggests a nexus of surf and 12-tone music consisting of F♯-C♯-C-B-A-F (four times) B-E-D♯-D-C-A♯ (two times) F♯-C♯-C-B-A-F (two times). A quarter-note snare beat is used in the verses constructed as Bm (one bar)—C (one bar)—Bm (two beats; 2/4 measure)—Bm (two bars)—E (two bars)—C (5.5 beats)—D (6.5 beats) for what totals 9.5 bars (nine 4/4 measures, one 2/4 measure). "Flaming" is in 4/4 with no chorus. Instead it is a set of five repeated verses, each totaling eleven bars: E (one bar)—Dm (two bars)—Bm (one bar)—A (two bars)—E (two beats)—A (two beats)—D (two

beats)—Dm (two beats)—E (three bars). Mason plays a quarter-note beat on snare excepting the second and third bar (the first Dm) where he plays a fast, syncopated rhythm on a ride cymbal. On “Bike” Mason plays quarter notes on snare and does not play in the chorus save two pick-up quarter noes before the verse. Each verse is structured differently per the meter of the lyric and vocal line cadence:

Verse one: G 4/4→C 4/4→C 6/4→G 4/4→D 5/4→G 4/4 (27 beats) Verse two: G 4/4→C7 4/4→C7 7/4→G 4/4→D 4/4→G 4/4 (27 beats) Verse three: G 4/4→C 6/4→G 4/4→D 4/4→G 4/4 (22 beats) Verse four: G 4/4→C7 4/4→C7 5/4→G 2/4→D 4/4→G 4/4 (23 beats) Verse five: G 4/4→C7 4/4→C7 5/4→G 4/4→D 3/4→D 3/8→G 4/4 (27 beats) All Choruses: D 4/4→D 4/4→D 6/4→D 4/4 (18 beats)

22. Miles, *Many Years from Now*, 321.

23. George Martin with Jeremy Hornsby, *All You Need Is Ears: The Inside Personal Story of the Genius Who Created the Beatles* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1994), 209.

24. *Noise/Music: A History*, 78–9.

25. Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 669. Emphasis added.

26. *Noise*, 110.

27. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 58.

28. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 1.

29. Andrew Goodwin, “Popular Music and Postmodern Theory,” in *The Postmodern Arts: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Nigel Wheale (London: Routledge, 1991), 84–5.

30. As touched on, Goodwin’s argument is, in part, designed to rescue 1970s punk and New Wave from the category of postmodernism, arguing

bands like the Gang of Four and the Talking Heads were modernist musical interventions. I find much to agree with in Goodwin's analysis, although it does reflect a resistance to the very term "postmodern," which contains a pejorative connotation in certain quarters of cultural criticism, specifically Marxist cultural criticism.

31. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 19.

***Chapter 2***

1. As quoted in *The Beatles Anthology* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 2000), 274.

2. This continued into the 1970s with the debut of the syndicated show *Soul Train* in 1971, a version of *American Bandstand* emphasizing African-American performers and studio audiences for an assumed African American demographic. In 1972, *The Midnight Special* began as a weekly late-night concert show on NBC, with each show offering one or two performances (usually live on-stage but occasionally promotional films) by acts across the popular music spectrum of rock, hard rock, progressive rock, pop, disco, R&B, country, Fifties, etc. In 1975, the sketch-comedy show *Saturday Night Live* debuted and a weekly musical act was part of the show's format. A musical act is also frequently used to end late-night weekday talk-shows (i.e., *The Tonight Show* or *The Late Show*).

3. See Norma Coates, "Teenyboppers, Groupies, and Other Grotesques: Girls and Women and Rock Culture in the 1960s and early 1970s," *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2003): 74–5. However, when *The Beatles* entered reruns from 1967 to 1969, a new opening title sequence was devised to "update" the show by including photos of the "counterculture Beatles" with longer hair and facial hair.

4. This tended to be the overall format for rock music promotional films in the late 1960s: performers in an outdoor locale mining the song and/or performing other actions, usually enhanced with filmic effects. When their

debut single “Arnold Layne” hit the U.K. Top 20 in the spring of 1967, Pink Floyd was invited to perform the song on *Top of the Pops* and the band offered to do a promotional film rather than the standard practice of appearing on *TOTP* miming. Inspired by Dada and Surrealist films, the video for “Arnold Layne” was shot in black and white on a beach with the band roaming about and cavorting with a male manikin—sometimes all wearing identical grinning, grotesque masks. The video also included extensive use of jump-cuts, zooms, pans, fast motion, and reverse motion. Unfortunately, by the time the film was completed, “Arnold Layne” dropped from the charts and *TOTP* declined to air it. Procol Harum’s promotional film for their hit single “A Whiter Shade of Pale” (1967) intercut between the band performing the song in a studios setting, wandering the ruins of Whitley Court, and stock news footage of Vietnam. *TOTP* refused to air it due to the potential political controversy. The promotional film for the Kinks’ “Dead End Street” (1966) was a dark comedy in which the band played undertakers toting a coffin through London with the chorus a montage of Great Depression–era photos. The BBC refused to air the video, deeming it “distasteful.”

5. As quoted in *The Beatles Anthology*, 214.

6. The *American Bandstand* segment is archived at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysG6GN9n3nE. Accessed: August 5, 2014.

7. However, one could argue that the “Paperback Writer” promotional film contains a subversive element by constructing an *internal* tension, placing the Beatles in a bourgeois setting while performing a rock song with film effects like jump-cuts, extreme close-ups, and quick pans. In other words, high culture and pop culture collide rather than blend.

8. The “Hello Goodbye” video did not air in Britain due to stipulations agreed upon by between the BBC and the Musicians’ Union. When *Top of the Pops* debuted in 1964, performers lip-synched until the MU objected and *TOTP* instituted a live performance policy. However, in order to maintain a degree of quality control over performances and the potential problems of a live TV performance (equipment problems, sloppy execution, etc.) in 1966 *TOTP* and the MU agreed that performers could lip-

synch/mime the song provided all performers on the record were represented on the telecast (on-stage or in the promotional film). “Hello Goodbye” was ruled ineligible for broadcast in that two viola players who played on the record were not in the video. In this respect, the avant-garde conceptuality of “Strawberry Fields Forever” and the conscious “anti-miming” ending of “Penny Lane” also can be taken as efforts to avoid any potential problems with the miming policy.

9. Three versions of “Hello Goodbye” were completed under McCartney’s direction: one of the Beatles miming the song in the Sgt. Pepper outfits; a second with the Beatles mining the song in contemporary 1960s fashions, and a third including outtakes of the other two versions with the Beatles’ madcap dancing and general cavorting on stage. The first version was the one shown on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. See John C. Winn, *That Magic Feeling: The Beatles Recorded Legacy, Volume Two 1966–1970* (New York: Three Rivers, 2009), 135.

10. See Carlin, 143.

11. As quoted in Carlin, 153. In 1984, McCartney wrote and starred in *Give My Regards to Broad Street*, a musical comedy in which McCartney played himself in an fictional adventure involving lost master tapes and nefarious business types, interspersed with musical performances of his greatest hits and capped by a corny “it was just a dream—or was it?” ending. The film was panned critically and floundered commercially, with the soundtrack generating most of the product revenue.

12. *MMT* also features a guest performance by the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band, whose rendition of their Elvis parody “Death Cab for Cutie” takes place at the Raymond Revuebar—at the time, a well-known Soho district strip club—with the accompanied by exotic dancer Jan Carson doing a strip tease well within BBC censor limitations.

13. As quoted in Miles, *Many Years From Now*, 355.

14. George Martin later expressed regret over the policy, specifically the decision to omit “Penny Lane” and “Strawberry Fields Forever” from *Sgt.*

*Pepper* strictly on the grounds they were previously released (see *The Beatles Anthology*, 239).

### *Chapter 3*

1. As quoted in *The Beatles Anthology*, 305.

2. As quoted in Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 98.

3. As quoted in Carlin, 171.

4. One of the first of many financial debacles was Apple Boutique, a clothing store featuring high-end fashion by the Dutch art/design collective "the Fool." Opened in late 1967, Apple Boutique closed in mid-1968 with an estimated loss of $50,000 owning to endless remodeling, rampant shoplifting, and the exorbitant production costs of the clothing (see Carlin, 156).

5. As quoted in Carlin, 164–5. Emphasis original.

6. As quoted at http://www.thewhitealbumproject.com/design/. Accessed: June 8, 2015.

7. Kenneth Gloag, "Situating the 1960s: Popular Music—Postmodernism—History," *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 5:3 (2011): 403.

8. Robert Christgau, "Life without the Beatles," *The Village Voice* (September 1971). Achieved at: http://www.robertchristgau.com/xg/bk-aow/beatles.php. Accessed: June 8, 2014.

9. Kenneth Womack, *Long and Winding Roads: The Evolving Artistry of the Beatles* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), 219–20.

10. The other 1950s-style rock song, “Birthday” was pastiche; it was written and recorded in a single night including a break to watch the rock music-comedy *The Girl Can’t Help It* (1957) on TV. In his 1980 *Playboy* interview, Lennon described the song as “a piece of garbage.”

11. On “Back in the U.S.S.R.” the recurring jet plane effect is similar to Brain Eno’s use of seemingly aleatory synthesizer noises on the first two Roxy Music records. Indeed, “Back in the U.S.S.R.” is highly reminiscent of early Roxy Music as far as the ironic utilization of popular music genres filtered through an avant-garde, postmodern sensibility.

12. George Martin recounted, “I thought we should have made a very, very good single album rather than a double. But they insisted…. I later learned that by recording all this songs they were getting rid of their contact with EMI more quickly” (as quoted in *The Beatles Anthology*, 305).

13. McCartney’s acoustic ballad “Blackbird” was a song about the American Civil Rights movement cast in metaphorical terms of a black bird taking flight to freedom. The problem as political music is that the lyrics are so ambiguous it is difficult to ascertain any political subtext, while musically the song is based on a piece by Bach, which is to say a song about the struggles of black Americans framed in music derived from white Continental classical music. In this sense, the intrusion of “noise” in “Blackbird” is the tape loops of bird calls that do not act as a nature backdrop but function more as a “free bird solo” to end the song.

14. David Brackett, “Pastiche,” in *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music: Volume II: Performance and Production*, ed. John Shepherd, David Horn, Dave Laing, Paul Oliver, and Peter Wicke (New York: Continuum, 2003), 214. As discussed, my interpretations are that “Yer Blues” is a parody of the “white blues” genre and “Good Night” a political satire of old-fashioned “light music,” whereas “Revolution 9” is a serious attempt at avant-grade/experimental music. “Wild Honey Pie” serves as the satire of avant-garde/experimental music.

15. As quoted in Jon Weiner, *Come Together: John Lennon in His Time* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 62.

16. Carlin, 164.

17. This relates to another issue regarding "Revolution." The famous guitar intro is lifted from Pee Wee Crayton's blues song "Do Unto Others" (1954) and "Revolution" uses a similar blues song structure. Moreover, both songs essentially convey the same lyrical message. While Crayton uses biblical verse and Lennon political rhetoric, both songs suggest that social change and harmony is only achieved through compassion and understanding rather than batons and bullets.

18. *Come Together,* 60.

19. See Abe Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 168.

20. As quoted in Weiner, 65–6. While beginning his career as a rock critic, Jon Landau moved into the record industry and produced the MC5's *Back in the U.S.A.* (1970), although his production greatly watered-down the chaotic volatility the band was known for and effectively captured on their debut live album *Kick Out the Jams* (1969). Landau is best-known for being Bruce Springsteen's long-time manager and co-producer of many of Springsteen's records, including *Born to Run* (1975) and *Born in the U.S.A.* (1984).

21. Jeffery Roessner, "We All Want to Change the World: Postmodern Politics and the Beatles' *White Album*," in *Reading the Beatles: Cultural Studies, Literary Criticism, and the Fab Four*, ed. Kenneth Womack and Todd F. Davis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 147–8.

22. As quoted in Weiner, 61.

23. The Beatles and Charles Manson were permanently connected in pop-culture consciousness in that Manson's alleged "Helter Skelter" race war theory as the motive for the Tate-LaBianca murders was supposedly inspired by messages he received listening to *The White Album* (namely "Helter Skelter" and "Piggies").

24. While John Lennon was increasingly becoming the Beatles' self-appointed political spokesperson, it was George Harrison who made a surprise appearance on *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* (November 17, 1968), encouraging the Smothers Brothers to "keep trying" amid the controversy roiling around the show.

25. Ian MacDonald, *Revolution in the Head: The Beatles' Records and the Sixties* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2007), 291.

26. *McCartney: A Life*, 162–3.

27. *Revolution in the Head*, 294.

***Chapter 4***

1. As quoted in *The Beatles Anthology*, 302.

2. Ono's vilification as the person whose influence—or interference—singlehandedly destroyed the Beatles has been all-too-often overstated, although her close relationship with John Lennon certainly became a major point of contention as far as her constant and not necessarily welcome presence and influence in the studio and rehearsals.

3. Miles, *Many Years From Now*, 527.

4. As quoted in Miles, *Many Years From Now*, 527

5. Richard Leppert, "Commentary" in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 94–5.

6. George Harrison's *Electronic Sound*—an album of Harrison performing on Moog synthesizer (or, less charitably, aimlessly fiddling with a Moog synthesizer) and *Unfinished Music No. 2: Life with the Lions* were released on the Apple's short-lived subsidiary Zapple, a specialty subsidy label of Apple devised by McCartney in 1968 and run by Barry Miles as an outlet for experimental music as well as planned spoken word albums by the likes of Richard Brautigan and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. One also suspects this was

business strategy intended to separate, if not isolate, Zapple's difficult avant-garde product line against Apple's roster of accessible pop and rock performers (notably Badfinger and Billy Preston) for an assumed audience with different tastes as cultural consumers. It was not coincidental that "Zapple" sounded quite similar to "Zappa." One of Klein's first moves as CEO was scrapping Zapple Records in favor of releasing all musical products—commercial or otherwise—on Apple Records.

7. As quoted in Cara Cromwell, "How John Lennon Turned to Cambridge for Life After the Beatles," *Cambridge News* (October 8, 2010). Archived at: http://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/News/How-John-Lennon-turned-to-Cambridge-for-life-after-The-Beatles.htm. Accessed: June 6, 2014.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. In a 1969 *Melody Maker* review, Richard Williams received a promotional version of *Wedding Album* with each side on separate discs and a continuous test signal on the other side. Williams assumed *Wedding Album* was a double album and praised the test signal sides over "John and Yoko" and "Amsterdam." Delighted with the review, Lennon and Ono sent a telegram to Williams thanking him and saying, "We both feel that this is the first time a critic topped the artist…We are not joking."

11. Despite the magazine's long-time aversion to avant-garde (read: "arty") music, *Rolling Stone* gave effusively positive reviews to *Two Virgins* and *Wedding Album* (although Ed Ward's *RS* review of *Life with the Lions* dismissed it as "utter bullshit"). This owed, at least in part, to Lennon and *Rolling Stone* serving mutual interests. An advance photo of the back cover of *Two Virgins* was used as the cover of *Rolling Stone* (November 23, 1968)—which sold in droves at the time the struggling magazine badly needed an economic boost—along with an exclusive Lennon interview by Jonathan Cott who wrote the highly positive review of *Two Virgins* (*RS*, March 1, 1969); to note, Cott was an associate of the Beatles who was commissioned to co-author a planned book on the band in conjunction with the aborted *Get Back* project. Jann Wenner wrote an even more rhapsodic and at times almost incomprehensible rave of *Wedding Album* as part of an article "John

Lennon, Man of the Year" (*RS*, February 7, 1970). Wenner was subsequently rewarded with an exclusive personal interview with Lennon published in *Rolling Stone* in early 1971, in which Lennon alternately lambasted the Beatles as little more than cultural imperialists while casting himself as the victim of the industry, record executives, and the other Beatles' machinations (see Carlin, 207–8). However, *Rolling Stone*'s album guide and bio for Lennon at http://www.rollingstone.com/music/artists/john-lennon/albumguide rates Lennon's albums on 1 to 5 star scale: *Two Virgins* and *Wedding Album* received 1.5 stars while *Life with the Lions* garnered one star and largely discounts them. This bio also questions the Beatles myth that Lennon was the rock side and McCartney the pop side, although *Rolling Stone* was one of the key critical discourses as far as initially constructing the "Lennon vs. McCartney" binary in the late 1960s-early 1970s.

12. Here one can consider Lennon's song "Working Class Hero" from *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band* (1970). An acoustic ballad in 6/8 with a repeated Am-G chord pattern, Lennon's fundamentally Marxist attack on the capitalist system ends does not end with a call for the masses to organize around each other in mutual liberation, but to organize around *him* and follow his example as the revolutionary vanguard artist.

13. Here the thorny issue of the celebrity engaged political action can only briefly be considered. In the case of the Lennon-Ono-Trudeau "summit," if nothing else Trudeau provided some political credibility to Lennon and Ono as far as a world leader taking their campaign seriously. As important, Trudeau constructed a relationship with the younger generation of voters through his endorsement of Lennon and Ono. The problem for the star is an alienating effect activism can produce. Jane Fonda's photo-ops with the Viet Cong not only outraged many Americans as nothing short of treason but provoked a rebuke in *Letter to Jane* (1972, Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin), a film which deconstructed one of the photos to argue the celebrity can only play the role of revolutionary. Another issue is the extent the celebrity, and more specifically the rock star, becomes a symbol of self-promotion and "selling out" rather than working for global change, such as Bono's parade of photo-ops with various world leaders (Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Tony Blair, Vladimir Putin, etc.).

14. The airing of *Rock and Roll Circus* was cancelled as Mick Jagger was highly dissatisfied with the Rolling Stones' uninspired performance, especially in comparison to the Who's powerhouse rendition of "A Quick One While He's Away." It was eventually released on home video in 1996.

15. As quoted in Robert Palmer, "On Thin Ice," liner notes to *Onobox* (6 CD-box set, Rykodisc, 0 14431–0244–35, 1992).

16. *Sound Effects*, 35–6. Emphasis added.

17. In late 1970, Lennon and Ono released *John Lennon/Plastic Ono* Band and *Yoko Ono/Plastic Ono Band*. As "companion albums," the front covers were almost identical with no credits and an instant camera photo of Lennon and Ono under a tree; the only difference was Lennon and Ono changed positions so Lennon was leaning on Ono on *Lennon/POB* and Ono leaning on Lennon on *Ono/POB*. The music was another matter. *Lennon/POB* was an album of slow, stark, polemical rock ballads with Lennon venting on various topics (rejecting idolatry in favor of unrepentant atheism on "God," mourning parental abandonment on "Mother," attacking proletariat false consciousness and the Ideological State Apparatus on "Working Class Hero"). Ono's album was recorded in one afternoon burst during the sessions for *Lennon/POB* in October 1970. Despite the avant-garde nature of the album the basic tracks were largely improvised using simple, repetitive, often blues-based riffs for experimental excursions with a rock quartet of lead vocalist (Ono), guitar (Lennon), bass (Klaus Voorman), and drums (Ringo Starr). The opening tack off *Ono/POB* is "Why" which begins with the sound of a tape machine beginning operations and the band already playing. Voorman plays a monotonal fuzz bass line and Starr provides a pounding backbeat throughout the song while Lennon's barrage of side guitar glissandos at times sound like a braying elephant and other times a short-circuiting electronic apparatus. Ono does not so much "sing" the title of the song but screams it in in an array of vocal inflections. "Why" not only suggests Krautrock and especially Can, but the NYC "No Wave" punk bands of the late 1970s. The following song, "Why Not" is slower with a more discernible blues feel and Starr playing a lumbering shuffle and Ono adopting a much more restrained, even "gentle" vocal style. "Why"

becomes an expression of rage and frustration and “Why Not” an expression of happiness and optimism.

***Chapter 5***

1. See Carlin, 174–5

2. Lennon suggested that the Beatles could (or should) simply replace Harrison with Eric Clapton, a move that would have not only consolidated the lead guitar position in the band but eliminated Harrison as a third wheel in the division of songwriting. McCartney and Starr flatly rejected the idea, and Clapton stated had the Beatles actually made the offer, he would have declined due to his friendship with Harrison.

3. Apple Studio was one of Apple Corps costliest mistakes. After realizing Madras’ studio was hopelessly inoperable, a new recording studio was redesigned and built under the supervision of Geoff Emerick. By the time it was completed in 1971, well after the Beatles’ disbanding, Apple Studio cost $1.5 million to get off the ground. It permanently ceased operations in 1975 and never returned a profit.

4. See Carlin, 176–9.

5. As quoted in David Browne, *Fire and Rain: The Beatles, Simon and Garfunkel, James Taylor, CNSY and the Lost Story of 1970* (New York: Da Capo, 2011), 135–6.

6. Klein was fired as the Stones’ manager in 1970, by which time the band realized that Klein, using dubious legal means, acquired the copyright of the bands’ entire catalogue while recording for Decca Records.

7. This proved to work in McCartney’s favor. In that Klein and McCartney never had a management agreement, Klein used that point to effectively shut McCartney out of Apple Corps. However, when McCartney eventually sued the other Beatles in November 1970 to legally end their partnership, the lack of any written contract between McCartney and Klein was a

deciding factor in McCartney's eventual victory in court. Apple was put into receivership and Klein forced to resign (and eventually fired) from Apple Corps. Long-time Beatle's assistant Neil Aspenall eventually became Apple CEO.

8. While more cordial than *The White Album* and *Get Back* sessions, the recording of *Abbey Road* was hardly free from conflict. Lennon lobbied for all of his songs to be on one side and McCartney's on the other side—in effect, a divided up solo album—but the idea was vetoed by Martin and the rest of the band. Nonetheless, one could argue that *Abbey Road* was ultimately divided with side one being along the lines of *The White Album* and side two harkening back to *Sgt. Pepper*.

9. As per the contractual agreement, songs were credited to "Lennon-McCartney" although Lennon and McCartney were no longer collaborating as songwriters. As far as songwriting, Lennon only contributed three songs running just over five minutes and later dismissed his contributions as throwaways. "Her Majesty" (McCartney, 0:23) was originally placed between "Mean Mr. Mustard" and "Polythene Pam" but removed and appeared as a separate track, coming after "The End" after twenty seconds of silence—the result of engineers editing the song out of the medley but saving it by adding it to the end of the tape, resulting in a happy accident that was left as the finished product.

10. *Fire and Rain*, 9.

11. In the midst of escalating controversy over political content, *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* was unceremoniously cancelled in 1969 under a bogus "breach of contract" claim by CBS. The Smothers Brothers sued CBS and won a financial judgment for wrongful termination, but their TV career was effectively ended. One suspects the *Let It Be* promotional films would have aired on *The Smothers Brothers* instead of the more mainstream *Ed Sullivan Show*.

12. When informed by EMI he would not receive production credit on *Let It Be* as he did not produce the final mix version released by Apple although he produced the basic tracks, Martin—not entirely jokingly—suggested to

EMI that the production credit should read "Produced by George Martin, over-produced by Phil Spector" (*The Beatles Anthology*, 350).

13. "Dig It" and "Maggie Mae" were jams; edited versions lasting less than a minute each were included on *Let It Be.*

14. In that *Let It Be* was filmed in January of 1969, the Beatles are shown rehearsing and/or discussing numerous songs, some of which were used for the later *Abbey Road* (e.g. "Maxwell's Silver Hammer," "Octopus's Garden"). Lennon was clearly unenthused during much of the filming, alternating between sullen and sarcastic with Ono by his side much of the time; he and Ono were also using heroin which made them all the more "lethargic." There was little footage of Lennon that was considered usable for the final cut. Lennon's performance of "Across the Universe" was eventually included which necessitated using the 1968 demo for the film soundtrack.

15. As quoted in Browne, 149–50.

16. *McCartney* was very much a solo album: McCartney played all the instruments and did all the vocals on the album save for sporadic contributions from Linda McCartney. While McCartney had several "solo songs" on *The White Album*, he was the only Beatle not to have released an official solo album. Starr's straightforward covers of standards *Sentimental Journey* was released just before *Let It Be.* Harrison released two albums of mostly instrumental fare (*Wonderwall Music* and *Electronic Sound*). Lennon released four albums with Ono—the three avant-garde/experimental music albums and the live debut of the Plastic Ono Band—as well as three successful singles and two solo appearances on *Top of the Pops*. Given the plethora of other Beatles' solo projects being released in conjunction—or in direct competition—with Beatles singles and albums, McCartney was understandably irate when the rest of the band and management all but ordered him to postpone the release of *McCartney* in deference to *Let It Be.* Apple subsequently conceded and released *McCartney* ahead of *Let It Be* after McCartney threatened to approach other labels.

17. Greil Marcus, *In the Fascist Bathroom: Punk and Pop Music, 1977–1992* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 167–8. The murder of John Lennon in 1980 played a central part in solidifying the Lennon and McCartney myth as far as their respective representations in rock culture. The worldwide mourning of Lennon was accompanied by a wave of historical revisionism exemplified by Marcus, as noted by Peter Ames Carlin. "[Lennon] was celebrated as a musical genius, a cultural visionary, a spiritual prophet. The Beatles, people wrote, could have never existed without him. Almost as if the others had all been Lennon's puppets…. Now he was becoming perfect: the working-class hero-turned- rocker-turned-brilliant artist-turned -peace activist. As if he'd led the Beatles single-handedly, as if Paul were just his cute, shallow buddy" (*Paul McCartney: A Life*, 258, 263).

18. Lester Bangs, *Mainlines, Bloodfeasts, and Bad Taste: A Lester Bangs Reader*, ed. Jim Morthland (New York: Anchor, 2003), 46. Emphasis original.

***Chapter 6***

1. As quoted in "'Opus 5': Young Frank Zappa's Early Avant-Garde Orchestral Music, 1963." Archived at: http://dangerousminds.net/comments/opus_5_young_frank_zappas_early_avant_garde_orchestral_music_1963. Accessed: 9/6/14.

2. In 1964, Zappa bought Pal Recording Studios from Buff and renamed it Studio Z. It closed the same year when the building was torn down to expand the street on which it was located.

3. Like "going to the drive-in," teens allegedly used going on "grunion runs" as a ruse for late-night parties on the beach.

4. Barry Miles, *Zappa: A Biography* (New York: Grove, 2005), 72–3.

5. Kelly Fisher Lowe, *The Words and Music of Frank Zappa* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), xxi. Emphasis original.

6. As quoted in Wragg: 209.

7. Zappa's appearance on *The Steve Allen Show* is archived at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MewcnFl_6Y. Accessed: March 5, 2014. It should be noted that Zappa does not mention the appearance in his autobiography, which is to say Zappa may have not considered it worth discussing, despite it being his national TV debut.

8. Miles, *Zappa*, 70.

9. Chris Crocker, "Frank Zappa" in Scott Schnider with Andy Schwartz, (eds.) *Rock Icons: An Encyclopedia of the Legends Who Changed Music Forever* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2008), 358.

10. Cage's interview and performance is archived at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSulycqZH-U. Accessed: January 24, 2014. Because *I've Got a Secret* was broadcast live, host Garry Moore dispensed with the customary question and answer segment of the show in order to briefly interview Cage about his work and guarantee sufficient time for the full performance of *Water Walk*. In his opening remarks, Moore explained the performance was not a "stunt" with Cage wandering about the stage making sounds at random, but a completely composed and rehearsed performance to the point Cage employed a stopwatch to ensure that each sound was produced at a precise moment. The piece called for the radios to be turned on at various points and all shut off near the end of *Water Walk*; however, a dispute between the stagehand and electrician unions over who should plug in the radios remained unresolved at airtime. Rather than this hitch compromising the integrity of the piece, Cage simply explained he was altering the performance so the unplugged radios would be struck with his palm instead of being turned on and shoved off the table when they were to be turned off (in this respect, an example of "chance factors" Cage readily sought to incorporate into composition and performance). Moore also cautioned Cage that the studio audience might find the performance humorous, which is to say they might not "properly" respond to a performance of experimental music by sitting and listening with rapt concentration and attentive contemplation per the classical music concert setting. Cage replied that he would be fine with that response and "I consider laughter more preferable to tears." As far as the music, *Water Walk*

manifests Cage's assertion that "if this word, music, is sacred and reserved for the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century instruments, we can substitute a more meaningful term: organization of sound" [John Cage*, John Cage: An Anthology*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991), 55]. The production of sound in *Water Walk* cannot be separated from the "theatricality" of the performance. Cage recounted *Water Walk* "was rehearsed very carefully, over and over again with people watching me and correcting me, because I had to do it in three minutes. It had many actions in it, and demanded what you might call virtuosity" [as quoted in William Fetterman, *John Cage's Theater Pieces* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 33]. However, the virtuosity required by *Water Walk* was not the traditional sense of virtuosity and highly specialized skill on a musical instrument cultivated by years of practice, such as the ability needed to perform a Beethoven composition on piano. Rather, the "virtuosity" of *Water Walk* required the performer to memorize the "plan of action" and the timing; in other words, accurately performing *x* action to produce *y* sound at *z* time. Theoretically, anyone—musician or not—can perform *Water Walk* once they learn the routine. In the case of *4'33"* the only thing the performer needs to know about the piano is how to open and close the lid.

11. In the summer of 1968, Zappa "reunited" with Allen when the Mothers appeared on Allen's syndicated talk show. Fittingly, one of the songs the Mothers performed was "America Drinks Up and Goes Home," a lounge jazz parody attacking the mass culture favored by middle-brow liberals like Allen; in turn, Allen showed excerpts of the insulting *Two Bicycles* appearance. In Pauline Butcher, *Freak Out!—My Life with Frank Zappa* (Medford, NJ: Plexus, 2011), she recalled after the appearance Zappa was "sullen and annoyed. Steve Allen had not taken him or his music seriously [and Allen] treated him like an old hippy" (134). One could also say as far as Zappa's relationship with Allen, "Fool me once shame on you, fool me twice shame on me."

## *Chapter 7*

1. As quoted in Courrier, 61.

2. Zappa recounted he joined the Soul Giants in 1964, and the name of the band was changed on Mother's Day, 1964. Several other accounts place Zappa joining the Soul Giants after his arrest in March of 1965 for intent to manufacture and distribute pornography. The case amounted to entrapment if it would even be prosecuted by today's standards. Undercover vice officers offered Zappa $300 to make a pornographic film, and Zappa eventually agreed to make an audio tape of a couple simulating sex for $100—although the tape was comedic as much as erotic. With the local press in tow, Zappa was arrested and subsequently the case was plea-bargained down to a misdemeanor conviction with time served (six days in jail) on a six-month suspended sentence and three years of probation. The judge could not contain his laughter when the tape was played as evidence, much to the prosecution's annoyance. See Miles, *Zappa*, 85–8; Miles suggested the incident helped shape Zappa's strident anti-authoritarianism—both in terms of his pro-free speech and anti-law enforcement views. One can also speculate that the legal fees incurred by Zappa, who was recently divorced as well, may have been a factor in joining a working rock band.

3. Ingber was fired for drug use affecting his on-stage performance. Ray Collins recalled a specific concert incident when Ingber was too stoned to realize he forgot to turn on his amp; Collins looked over to Zappa and, seeing the look of disgust, knew Ingber would soon be out of the band (see Miles, *Zappa*, 35–6).

4. Wilson was an African-American record producer who began his career working with free jazz legends Sun Ra and Cecil Taylor. He was also a crucial figure in the folk-rock explosion of the mid-1960s, producing Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone" among other Dylan recordings. Wilson also took Simon and Garfunkel's "The Sound of Silence," originally recorded and released as an acoustic song in 1964, and overdubbed a rock band without Simon and Garfunkel's knowledge in 1965; in fairness, they were still under contract to Columbia but had broken up. The revised folk-rock version became a chat-topping hit, prompting Simon and Garfunkel to reunite for a highly successful commercial run through the remainder of the 1960s.

5. Zappa placed the final cost at $25,000 to 30,000. See Frank Zappa with Peter Occhigrosso, *The Real Frank Zappa Book* (New York: Touchstone/Simon and Schuster, 1990), 78. I have taken the liberty of omitting the excessive use of italics, bold print, underlining of words, and words in all capital letters that appear throughout Zappa's book in this and other citations except as indicated.

6. Three singles were released from *Freak Out!* "How Could I Be Such a Fool?" b/w "It Can't Happen Here" and "Trouble Every Day" b/w "Who Are the Brain Police?" in 1966 and "Motherly Love" b/w "I Ain't Got No Heart" in 1968. None of them charted, and Zappa did not have a Top 40 hit until "Valley Girl" (1982).

7. Here Zappa's attack could be criticized as self-serving. A club that provides live music—whether as a concert venue for name acts, a site for local bands, or as a courtesy for customers such as a "piano bar"—is ultimately a place where the primary revenue generated through liquor sales, not concert tickets or cover charges.

8. *Essays on Music*, 430.

9. *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 77.

10. On "Brain Police" the guitars are tuned down a half-step and the notes indicated sound a half-stop lower on the recording.

11. As quoted at http://wiki.killuglyradio.com/wiki/Interview_by_Bob_Marshall. Accessed: September 20, 2014.

12. On the CD reissues of *Freak Out!*, the suite was broken into two separate songs, "Help I'm a Rock" and "It Can't Happen Here."

13. Mac Rebennack (better known as "Dr. John") and jazz keyboardist Les McCann played the piano on "Monster Magnet." According to Rebennack, "Frank had written me this part to play, five or six notes over and over…. In the background, a twenty-voice choir croaked out monster sound effects…. When I had had about all I could take, Les McCann walked in and I asked

him to hold my chair, telling him I had to go to the bathroom. I walked out of there and never came back" (as quoted in Miles, *Zappa*, 113).

14. Despite the overall chaos "Monster Magnet" was only a basic track when Verve cut off further capital for recording time. Planned overdubs could not be completed and "Monster Magnet" was released in what Zappa felt was an unfinished version but needed to fill out the double album. It would be the first of many disagreements between Zappa and Verve.

15. *Noise*, 28.

16. Here reading Zappa through Adorno proves more difficult. To be sure, Adorno's criticism of popular music had little in common with the reactionary responses to rock music of the 1950s where the moral outrage over "jungle music" was thinly-veiled racism. Adorno's concern was mass culture's encouragement of a regression of the individual and society into a modern barbarism, namely fascism and the Third Reich. However, some of Adorno's rhetorical choices in his criticism of popular music could resemble "conservative" criticism, such as his remarks on the "jitterbug" dancers of the Jazz Age: "It is stylized like the ecstasies savages go into in beating the war drums." Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991), 56.

17. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 47.

18. "Teenyboppers, Groupies, and Other Grotesques": 68.

***Chapter 8***

1. As quoted in Billy James, , *Necessity Is…: The Early Years of Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention* (London: SAF, 2001), 65.

2. Jim Fielder replaced Eliot Ingber as the Mothers' second guitarist, but quit the band before *Absolutely Free*'s release and removed from the

credits.

3. In retrospect, had *Freak Out!* omitted the unfinished, twelve-plus minute "Monster Magnet" and some of the older doo-wop/ Fifties style songs (i.e., the ones that were subsequently recycled and rerecorded for *Cruising with Ruben & the Jets*), it may well have been a more effective single album release.

4. Shortly after the Pandora's Box riot, the Los Angeles City Council voted to purchase the property under eminent domain and Pandora's Box was demolished in August 1967.

5. *The Word and Music of Frank Zappa*, 38.

6. *The Words and Music of Frank Zappa,* 41.

7. *The Words and Music of Frank Zappa*, 42–3.

8. As quoted in Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: An Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 47.

9. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 81.

10. *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 93.

11. As quoted in *Necessity Is…*, 64

12. A demonstration of Zappa's role and techniques as "conductor" and former Mothers' recollections of the experience of improvising with Zappa is achieved at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_ApXjLB00o. Accessed: June 26, 2014.

13. As quoted in *Necessity Is…*, 64.

14. See *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 92–8; see also *Necessity Is…,* 66–7.

15. See Miles, *Zappa*, 148.

16. The volatility of the Stooges concerts' was captured on *Metallic K.O.* (1976), portions of which were recorded during the final Stooges' concert in 1974. As well as the band's almost inept performance (one can reasonably assume drug intake played a major factor), Iggy Pop relentlessly insulted the audience and spontaneously changed lyrics to make the songs incredibly obscene. In turn, the audience hostility is audible, as well as the occasional sounds of objects thrown by the audience hitting the stage, which could be termed elements of aleatory noise within the songs.

17. As quoted in Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1977–1984* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 143.

18. As quoted in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. and trans. Ken Knapp (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2007), 51.

19. *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 95.

20. Miles, *Zappa: A Biography*, 141.

21. As quoted in Wragg: 212.

22. As quoted in *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker and Owens, 1987), 32.

23. *Noise/Music*, 84. Emphasis added. See also Michel Delville and Andrew Norris, *Zappa, Beefheart, and the Secret History of Maximalism* (Cambridge: Salt, 2005).

***Chapter 9***

1. As quoted in Miles, *Zappa*, 116. Emphasis original.

2. See Miles, *Zappa*, 150–3.

3. Another point of reference was the U.S. single cover photo for the Rolling Stones' "Have You Seen Your Mother, Baby, Standing in the

Shadow?" (1966): the Stones were dressed as middle-upper class women with decidedly grim expressions. The Stones' gender-sexual politics could often be questionable and "Mother" was one of more glaring examples of their misogynistic tendencies, with Jagger challenging the woman as to whether she wanted to be sexually liberated (i.e., hip) or a sexless square like her mother. In this sense, the Stones in drag in the "Mother" photo was ideologically consistent with *Money* as far as being an attack on women as signifiers of a sexually repressed Establishment rather than a subversive "gender bending" within rock culture (e.g., 1970s glam rock such as David Bowie or Suzi Quatro).

4. Zappa dismissed the San Francisco counterculture as "high school taken to the extreme … they had a 'more rustic than thou' approach" (as quoted in Miles, *Zappa*, 110).

5. In the original release of *Money*, among the many edits performed by Verve were excising two vocal parts from "Absolutely Free." In the piano intro, Suzy Creamcheese's proclamation she would no longer have sex to further the career of the band was edited to eliminate any references to intercourse. The second edit was eliminating a none-too-subtle moment of aural alienation effect; in mid-song a distorted, echoed voice loudly and simply exclaims, "Flower power sucks!" These parts were reinstated in later LP and CD reissues of *Money*.

6. *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 84.

7. As quoted in Hegarty, 84. Emphasis original.

8. *Noise/Music*, 84.

9. T.J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 13–4.

10. *Coming Apart,* 262.

11. Timothy Leary, *The Politics of Ecstasy* (Berkeley: Ronin, 1998), 174.

12. One major controversy arose when it was learned that the Monkees' performed little if any music on the early recordings, which was instead supplied by session musicians with the Monkees supplying the vocals and the public image. This inevitably prompted the "inauthentic" accusations from rock critics, although the same could be said for the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*, hailed as one of rock's canonical albums.

13. As quoted in Miles, *Zappa*, 158.

14. The following (and final) episode of *The Monkees* was "The Frodis Caper (a.k.a. 'Mijacogeo')" and ended with a guest performance by Tim Buckley while seated on the car destroyed by Zappa and Nesmith in the previous week's episode: an acoustic version of "Song to the Siren" and a song that can be interpreted as detailing the paradoxical allure and anguish of drug addiction (see Chapter 11, note 28).

15. *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 201–2.

16. As quoted in Larry Kart, "Zappa: The Mother in Us All," *Down Beat* (October 30, 1969). Archived at: http://afka.net/Articles/1969–10_Down_Beat.htm. Accessed: 9/27/14.

17. See *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, Chapters 16 and 17. By the 1980s and until his death in 1993, Zappa became one of rock's more vociferous critics of American conservatism, in particular the Reagan and Bush administrations and the Religious Right, in that Zappa's "practical conservatism"—which abhorred social conservatism—was closer to the neoliberalism of New Democrats of the 1990s like Bill Clinton rather than a Reagan Republican. However, as a political musician Zappa took pride in the fact that he was an ancillary figure in the collapse of Soviet Communism. As much for his neoliberal ideology as his trademark brand of avant-rock, Zappa was oppositional culture for audiences living under Marxist-Leninist systems and he developed a fan base across Eastern Europe. Following the Velvet Revolution of 1989 in which Czechoslovakia (which separated into the nation-states of the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993) became a liberal democracy, the elected president Václav Havel—a long-time Zappa fan—invited Zappa to the newly formed nation-state and

the two discussed Zappa becoming a trade ambassador. The Bush administration quickly vetoed the plan.

18. Miles, *Zappa*, 107–8, 146.

19. *The Words and Music of Frank Zappa*, 12.

20. This tract continued throughout Zappa's career with songs like "Valley Girl," "Catholic Girls," "Jewish Princess," and "Crew Slut."

21. As quoted in Wragg: 216. To use contemporary TV comedy comparisons, at his best Zappa was along the lines of *South Park*, mercilessly attacking liberals and conservatives, hippies and straights, and the Left and the Right with the cultural referencing and the vulgarity serving a purpose in advancing a vicious critique of modern life. At his worst, Zappa settled for an approach akin to *Family Guy*, where the liberal satire reinforced a conservative world-view of class, ethnic, racial, and sexual stereotypes while cultural referencing became a rapid-fire glut to test the audience's cultural literacy with vulgarity merely tossed in for immediate shock value.

22. *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 239.

## *Chapter 10*

1. As quoted in Miles, *Zappa*, 160.

2. As a later example, on Zappa's 1985 release *Frank Zappa Meets the Mothers of Prevention*, "Porn Wars" was a *musique concrète* piece using audio recordings of the Parents Music Resource Committee hearings in which Zappa testified in opposition to a proposed records rating system and engaged in some heated exchanges with members of Congress. The solemn and self-important speeches of several participants were electronically modified into comical gibberish.

3. "'Or Any Art At All?'", 212.

4. Following *Money*, Billy Mundi left the Mothers and was replaced by Art Tripp. A former member of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra who previously worked with John Cage, Tripp was a skilled mallet percussionist as well as a drummer.

5. *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 88–9.

6. *Uncle Meat* was eventually completed and released in 1987 as a direct-to-video film primarily made of up of archival home movie and live footage. In 1971, Zappa co-wrote and co-directed *200 Motels*, a surreal mock-documentary that incorporated live performances, sketch comedy, and animation.

7. In that *Uncle Meat* was taken from numerous recordings dating back to 1967, Ray Collins appeared on some tracks as lead or background vocalist; Billy Mundi played on some tracks, as did Art Tripp. Ruth Underwood was added as a mallet percussionist as well.

8. A twenty-two minute version of the Mothers performing "King Kong" on *Colour Me Pop* (BBC2, October 23, 1968) is achieved at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ToQWHNFZ2RE. This performance also includes a typical Mothers theatrical piece in which Don Preston concocts a drink behind his keyboard, consumes it, madly humps Roy Estrada, makes guttural sounds while deep-throating a microphone, takes a call from a prop phone, and then stumbles into a bed and flays about screaming.

9. *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 107.

10. As quoted in Miles, *Zappa*, 185.

11. As quoted in Kart; emphasis original. In Mike Bourne, "The Aesthetics of Freakery," a subsequent 1970 interview with *Down Beat*, Bourne reminded Zappa of his previous *Down Beat* interview about rock music consumers. Zappa corrected him by stating, "I didn't even say 'good music'—I said 'music.'" Archived at: http://afka.net/Articles/1970–07_Down_Beat.htm. Accessed: September 27, 2014.

12. As quoted in Howe, xx.

13. In this way, the main theme to “Peaches en Regalia” could be repeated and extended as necessary in concert performance as the basis for extended solos and improvisations.

14. In his memoir, *Beefheart: Through the Eyes of Magic* (London: Proper, 2010), John French recounted a night the Magic Band went to Sunset Sound Recorders studio to meet with Zappa, who was there with Fischer recording the song “Merry-Go-Round.” It largely consisted of several takes of Fischer screaming/chanting the title after which Zappa spent several hours constructing a mock-circus music backdrop. French estimated more money was spent by Zappa recording that one song for Fischer’s album than the entirety of *Trout Mask Replica* (see 399–400).

15. Miles, *Zappa*, 174.

16. “‘Or Any Art at All?’”, 211.

17. Alice Cooper’s *Love It to Death* (1971) was much more commercially successful and spawned the hit “I’m Eighteen,” one of Cooper’s best-known songs. Warner Bros. purchased the band’s contract from Straight and re-released the album on Warner Bros. Records. To note, as well as the live debut of the Plastic Ono Band, the Toronto Rock and Roll Revival festival also featured a performance by Alice Cooper in which the infamous “chicken incident” occurred. A live chicken somehow made its way on stage; Cooper grabbed it and threw it into the air over the audience, believing it would fly off. Instead, the chicken plummeted into the crowd where it was ripped apart. The story soon evolved so it was Cooper who dismembered a live chicken onstage and drank its blood. Alice Cooper was on Straight Records at the time and when Zappa inquired about the “chicken incident,” Cooper explained what actually transpired. Zappa strongly advised him to go with the story and not reveal what really happened.

18. Bangs, *Mainlines*, 178.

19. John Lennon was a fan of *Safe as Milk*, and reportedly interested in signing Beefheart to Apple Records’ subsidiary label Zapple. When plans

fell through, *Strictly Personal* included the song "Beatle Bones 'n' Smoking Stones," a fairly overt attack on the Beatles.

20. In 1971, Buddah released a single album culled from these sessions titled *Mirror Man*, with a misleading disclaimer it was a live album recorded in Los Angeles in 1965 to avoid copyright issues.

21. As quoted in Courrier, 59.

22. Ornette Coleman, "Prime Time for Harmolodics," *Down Beat* (July 1983): 55.

23. Anton Ehernzwing, *The Hidden Order of Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 25–7. In fact, Beefheart was an accomplished abstract expressionist painter and sculptor, and following his retirement from music in the early 1980s had a successful career in the visual arts.

24. As quoted in Courrier, 83–4.

25. As quoted in Miles, *Zappa*, 182; see also Courrier, 98.

26. As quoted in Mike Barnes, "Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band: *Trout Mask Replica*," *Perfect Sound Forever* (online magazine, February 1999). Archived at: www.furious.com/beefheart/troutmaskreplica3.html. Accessed: May 15, 2010.

27. As quoted in Courrier, 98–9.

28. *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 51; see also 51–3. The board was a briefcase mounted, portable eight-channel mixer that could be wired into a tape machine that Kunc used for to record Mothers' concerts, including material that appeared on *Uncle Meat*.

29. As quoted in Courrier, 98.

30. Courrier, *Trout Mask Replica*, 102.

31. Langdon Winner, "*Trout Mask Replica*," in *Stranded: Rock and Roll for a Desert Island*, ed. Greil Marcus (New York: Da Capo, 1979), 61.

32. *In the Fascist Bathroom*, 148.

33. As quoted in Bangs, *Mainlines*, 180.

34. *Stranded*, 61.

35. According to French, Beefheart played the bass clarinet part on "Dachau Blues" and not Hayden (see *Through the Eyes of Magic*, 799) and also recalled, "Victor never rehearsed with us…. Don decided to just include Victor—who basically knew nothing about bass clarinet—in the recording sessions at the last minute" (*Through the Eyes of Magic*, 458). Hayden's inclusion in the band was not well-received by other members; Harkleroad recalled, "He's breathing with a horn in his mouth, moving his fingers, and he's in the band?—after the effort we put into those parts? (as quoted in French, 457). In this respect, the only song that Hayden appears on for certain is "Hair Pie: Bake 1" which begins with a free jazz horn duet by Beefheart and Hayden and one of the early "field recordings" done at the rehearsal space/house: they were improvising on the patio. Hayden also appears on the album in the "Fast 'n' Bulbous" dialogue track with Beefheart.

36. *Noise/Music*, 85.

37. As quoted in Courrier, 126.

38. Mike Barnes, "Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band: *Trout Mask Replica*," *Perfect Sound Forever* (February 1999). Archived at: http://www.furious.com/perfect/beefheart/troutmaskreplica32.html. Accessed: October 11, 2014.

39. See French, 813.

40. Courrier, *Trout Mask Replica*, 127.

41. John R. Lane, "New Works 1988–1989: Exhibition Notes," San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Accessed at: http://www.beefheart.com/new-work-1988–89-exhibition-introduction-by-john-r-lane/. Accessed: September 18, 2014. These notes were written to

accompany an exhibition of Beefheart's abstract expressionist paintings at the museum.

42. As quoted at http://wiki.killuglyradio.com/wiki/Interview_by_Bob_Marshall. Accessed: September 20, 2014.

43. Kelly Fisher Lowe positioned Zappa as one of the architects of the "progressive rock" genre that emerged as the 1970s; see *The Words and Music of Frank Zappa*, 2–9. To be sure, the Mothers and especially Zappa's solo work in the late 1960s and beyond shared similar traits with progressive rock bands: a general classical-jazz-rock hybrid style; longer compositions with complex structural elements; frequent meter and tempo changes; music that demanded considerable skill if not virtuosity as far as performance. Where it becomes difficult to place Zappa in the progressive rock genre is the absence of pre–20th century classical music and literary influences that were pervasive in progressive rock (e.g., ELP, Gentle Giant, or Jethro Tull). In this respect, Zappa and the Mothers better compare to the so-called "Canterbury bands" ranging from Soft Machine to Henry Cow as far as the greater emphasis on twentieth-century musical and literary influences.

44. *Noise/Music*, 79.

45. See Ben Watson, *Frank Zappa: The Negative Dialectics of Poodle Play* (New York: St. Martin's, 1996); see also Wragg, op. cit.

46. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 396.

47. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 396, 403.

48. See Michel Delville, "Zappa and the Avant-Garde: Artifice/Absorption/Expression," in *Frank Zappa and the And*, ed. Dr. Paul Carr (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013).

49. As quoted in Frank Kofsky, "Frank Zappa: the Mothers of Invention," *Jazz & Pop* (two part interview, September–October 1967). Archived at:

http://www.afka.net/articles/1967–09_Jazz_Pop.htm. Accessed: February 4, 15.

50. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 396, 409.

51. In a letter to Walter Benjamin commenting on Benjamin's defense of cinema as a potentially revolutionary art form, Adorno's sharply responded, "The laughter of the audience at the cinema … is anything but good and revolutionary; instead, it is full of the worst bourgeois sadism." As quoted in Ernst Bloch, *Aesthetics and Politics: Debates between Bloch, Lukacs, Brecht, Benjamin, Adorno* (New York: Verso, 2007), 213. Ultimately, the laughter that Zappa's mockery generates often becomes a sadistic "laughing at" the targets of the songs as stereotypes rather than individuals, yet alone social formations.

52. *Sound Effects*, 14.

53. Adorno, *Essays on Music,* 314.

54. Adorno, "The Culture Industry Reconsidered," in *The Culture Industry*, 106.

55. Volpacchio, Florindo, "The Mother of All Interviews: Zappa on Music and Society." *Telos* 87 (Spring 1991): 129.

56. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 237–8.

## *Chapter 11*

1. As quoted in McNeil and McCain, 24.

2. As quoted in "Roy Edroso, "Lou Reed," *Rock: The Rough Guide*, 2d ed., eds. Jonathan Buckley, Orla Duane, Mark Ellingham, and Al Spicer (London: Rough Guide, 1999), 812.

3. On September 16, 1963, Cale appeared on the game show *I've Got a Secret*, with his secret being he was one of the Pocket Theater performers with another man whose secret was he was the only audience member who sat through the entire eighteen hour-plus performance. As part of the appearance, Cale played *Vexations* on piano—once.

4. For optimal effect, *Composition 1960 #7* is best performed by instruments capable of sustaining chords, such as an electronic organ or polyphonic synthesizer in which the piece can be played for as long as the keys are depressed. Bowed string instruments can also be effectively used. In contrast, using tuned percussion like a marimba or xylophone would result in a very brief performance.

5. As an example, an E minor open chord played on a standard tuned guitar consists of the notes E-B-E-G-B-E; on "Ostrich guitar" tuned to E the notes playing the same chord would be E-F♯-F♯-E-E-E-E.

6. Electrified or not, viola has never been considered particularly suitable, yet alone standard, instrumentation in rock. In terms of rock orthodoxy, viola is an instrument immediately associated with classical music whereas an accepted rock auxiliary instrument like the saxophone is associated R&B, funk, soul, or jazz. In the 1960s, two American psychedelic bands included violinists, United States of America and It's a Beautiful Day. In the 1970s rock bands with a violinist (usually doubling on keyboards, bass, guitar, or other instruments) overwhelmingly tended to be in the art rock or progressive rock category: Family, Curved Air, King Crimson, Gentle Giant, Roxy Music, Electric Light Orchestra, Can, Amon Düül II, and Kansas (among others). Exceptions would be the country rock of the Charlie Daniels Band (Daniels played guitar and violin, the latter featured on his 1979 hit "The Devil Went Down to Georgia") and glam rock band Slade in that bassist Mike Lea occasionally played violin (the 1971 hit "Coz I Love You"). In recent decades, violins and other such string instruments have become more acceptable in terms of rock as far as a folk-rock or roots rock instrument and their prominence in genres such as chamber pop.

7. As quoted in Steven Watson, *Factory Made: Warhol and the Sixties* (New York: Pantheon, 2003), 296.

8. As quoted in Dave Thompson, *Your Pretty Face is Going to Hell: The Dangerous Glitter of David Bowie, Iggy Pop, and Lou Reed* (London: Backbeat, 2009), 21.

9. As quoted in McNeil and McCain, 18.

10. Victor Bockris and Gerald Malanga, *Up-Tight: The Velvet Underground Story* (London: Omnibus, 2002), 25.

11. As quoted in Thompson, 23.

12. As quoted in Bockris and Malanga, 31–2.

13. As quoted in McNeil and McCain, 15–6.

14. As quoted in Bockris and Malanga, 31.

15. Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove, 1958), 81–2.

16. *Factory Made: Warhol and the Sixties*, 285–6.

17. To be sure, other factors contributed to the rivalry between the Velvets and Zappa, and more generally the East Coast and West Coast scenes. Following the EPI shows, Bill Graham commissioned Danny Williams to design a similar light show for the Fillmore, inviting criticisms that the light show as a staple of West Coast psychedelic rock was copied from the EPI. When the Doors emerged, Gerald Malanga claimed Jim Morrison's leather pants-stud persona, a stark contrast to hippie fashions, was stolen from him (see *Please Kill Me*, 17). Barry Miles also suggested that elements of the Mothers' rock theater at the Garrick Theater shows compared to the EPI as far as the improvisation, props, and plays—a view Zappa *strongly* dismissed (see Thompson, 33). Reed and Cale savaged Zappa and his music throughout Zappa's life; one apocryphal story went that after Zappa was severely injured when a concertgoer pushed him off the stage at London's Rainbow Theater in 1971, Reed insisted on playing the Rainbow rather than the Hammersmith Odeon so he could see the spot Zappa landed. In any event, the feud, at least between the Zappa estate and Reed, ended in 1995

when Lou Reed was selected by the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame to give the induction speech for Zappa's posthumous induction. Reed personally discussed the matter with Gail Zappa to get the family's permission beforehand and gave a gracious and respectful speech—especially since the Velvet Underground had yet to be inducted (the Velvets entered the next year).

18. As quoted in Thompson, 33–4.

19. As quoted in McNeil and McCain, 17.

20. Christopher Gair, *The American Counterculture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 197.

21. Susan Sontag, "Introduction," *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), xxxvii.

22. As quoted in Victor Bockris, *Warhol: The Biography* (New York: Da Capo, 2003), 251–2.

23. According to Cale, "All Tomorrow's Parties" was rerecorded with Wilson during the Los Angeles sessions; see Harvard, 84.

24. See Harvard, 35–47.

25. As quoted in Harvard, 42.

26. As quoted in Harvard, 43–4.

27. On "Heroin" the guitar is tuned a half-step down and the chords sound as C♯, F♯, and E. The chords can be played as basic open chords (D, G, F)—a fairly rudimentary song that can easily be played by a beginner guitarist, which could not be said for a typical Frank Zappa song.

28. Tim Buckley's "Song to the Siren" (*Starsailor*) is a similar yet different representation of drug addiction to "Heroin." Rather than Reed's literalness in describing the process and effects of drug use, lyrically Buckley adopts

the ancient myth of the sirens and their simultaneously seductive/destructive song leading (or luring) seafarers to their doom as a metaphor for drug addiction. Musically, the main instrument on "Song to the Siren" is an electric guitar with heavy phase-shifting playing a recurring D-A-G-Bm progression (with subtle modifications) and reverbed half-screamed/half-sung wordless vocals in the background. While the song has an overall drive, it is performed by Buckley without a discernible, steady time signature and instead the song "drifts" from verse to verse without a strong sense of meter, signifying aimlessness alternating with moments of euphoria and desperation. Whereas "Heroin" ends with a third note (F) after the two note alternation that occurs throughout the song (D and G), "Song to the Siren" ends on G, rather than the tonic D, and Buckley remaining "adrift" in the seas amid the siren's call (i.e., drug addiction).

29. On an early version of "Venus in Furs" included on the *Peel Slowly and See* box-set, Cale sings a rather mannered lead vocal while Reed and Morrison play acoustic guitars; the song has a distinct English folk feel. Nico does not appear on "Venus in Furs" nor did she sing the song live during her tenure with the Velvets. While Reed and Morrison frequently recounted the reason Nico did not sing on most of the Velvet's songs was because her voice simply did not fit the material, given *Venus in Furs* is about the sexual relationship between a submissive man and dominant woman, Nico on lead vocals would not have been incongruent.

30. Here one can compare Rihanna's song "S&M" (2010). As the title suggests, there is a conflation of sadism and masochism into the more popular term "sado-masochism" and the song expresses the conflation around dreamy disco verses (masochistic suspense) and an aggressive chorus driven by a fuzz synth bass riff (sadistic action). Unlike "Venus in Furs," in "S&M" the lyrics are entirely in the first person, and often indicate Rihanna is singing from the "position" of being the person sexually dominated rather than being the dominatrix, and by extension a woman being sexually dominated by a man unlike the relationship in "Venus in Furs." However, in the music video Rihanna is, at various points, shown as both the dominated and the dominatrix. In an unintended irony, near the end she is seen peeling and eating a banana (read: performing fellatio), recalling *VU and Nico*'s front cover.

31. Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs* (New York: Zone, 1991), 33–4.

32. As with "Heroin," on "Venus in Furs" the guitars are turned a half step down (i.e., D sounds as a C ♯).

33. Indeed, Nico's status as an insider in the Factory but an outsider with the Velvets lent a certain irony to "Femme Fatale" and "All Tomorrow's Parties" functioning as studies of the Factory scene. As much as Nico is sometimes reviled among the Velvet Underground faithful, one can suggest that if "Femme Fatale" and "ATP" were sung by Reed they could have amounted to snide put-downs, especially since both songs are third-person attacks women in the counterculture. Indeed, despite the considerable differences in the lyrical style, and the fact that "Femme Fatale" and "ATP" are sung by a woman, the songs can be heard as expressing sexist sentiments similar to Frank Zappa (i.e., "Plastic People," "Son of Suzy Creamcheese").

34. As quoted in Bockris and Malanga, 51.

35. On the demo version of the song recorded in 1965, included on *Peel Slowly and See*, "All Tomorrow's Parties" is done in a brisk acoustic folk style with an unmistakable Bob Dylan influence.

36. *In C* performance notes also state "It is possible to use improvised percussion in strict rhythm (drum kits, cymbals, bells, etc.), if it is carefully done and doesn't overpower the ensemble."

37. As quoted in McNeil and McCain, 17.

38. David Fricke, "White Light/White Heat," (March 14, 1985). Archived at: http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/white-light-white-heat-19850314. Accessed: October 2, 2014.

39. Given the acrimony that developed between Zappa and the Velvets, in a 1981 interview with *New Musical Express*, Sterling Morrison gave his explanation for the delayed release of *The Velvet Underground and Nico*: "I know what the problem was: it was Frank Zappa and his manager Herb

Cohen. They sabotaged us in a number of ways, because they wanted to be the first [band] with a freak release." However, it is doubtful that Zappa, as a relatively unknown rock performer at the time, had the clout to influence Verve in any substantial way regarding the Velvets. Moreover, many of the delays regarding *VU and Nico* were internal rather than external (i.e., the album cover production issues, the decision to record and add "Sunday Morning" for more commercial potential, etc.).

40. Subsequent reissues added "The Velvet Underground and Nico" in the upper left corner.

41. *Up-Tight*, 122; see also Harvard, 139. Warhol designed numerous albums covers, many in his signature Pop Art "portrait" style, although his best-known design was for the Rolling Stones' *Sticky Fingers* (1971), which consisted of a man's crotch in tight jeans with an actual working zipper. Unfortunately, the zipper tended to damage adjacent record covers and the vinyl when the albums were shipped in stacks or shelved in the buyer's record collection. It was eventually replaced with a photo image of the zipper.

***Chapter 12***

1. As quoted in David Fricke, "Overloaded: The Story of *White Light/White Heat*." Archived at: http://bigread.mojo4music.com/2013/11/velvet-underground/. Accessed: February 5, 2015.

2. As quoted in Bockris and Malanga, *Up-Tight*, 124.

3. The *Look of the Week* segment is archived at www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTfDUyUkVYE. Accessed: June 4, 14.

4. In 1961, Hans Keller was behind the "Poitr Zak" hoax. Keller and pianist Susan Bradshaw devised a piece in which they struck percussion instruments at random and then added a tape of electronic noises. The piece was titled *Mobile for Percussion and Tape* and credited to "Poitr Zak," a fictional Polish experimental music composer supposedly influenced by

Cage and Stockhausen. *Mobile* premiered on the *BBC Third Programme* radio show alongside works by Mozart, Anton Webern, and Luigi Nono. The goal was not so much to satirize avant-garde music (Keller was a champion of Schoenberg and Bradshaw a close associate of Pierre Boulez), but what Keller believed was a growing tendency of critics to unconditionally embrace any and all experimental music no matter how deficient. However, the hoax largely backfired when the vast majority of music critics savaged *Mobile* in comparison to the other composers.

5. See *Sound Effects*, 21.

6. See Ola Stockfelt, "Adequate Modes of Listening," trans. by Anahid Kassabian and Leo G. Svendsen, in *Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinarity, Culture*, ed. David Schwarz, Anahid Kassabian, and Lawrence Siegel (Richmond: University of Virginia Press, 1997), 138.

7. As quoted in Macan, 152–3.

8. *Against Interpretation*, 265.

9. *The Theater and Its Double*, 125.

10. One missed opportunity was a possible appearance by the Velvets/EPI in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966) which fell through due to the logistics of transporting the EPI to England; Antonioni hired the Yardbirds instead. There was also some mild interest in the Velvets by Apple Corps that eventually dissipated. According to Nico, shortly before her dismissal from the Velvets she attended the record release party of *Sgt. Pepper* at Epstein's home. "There was a song on *Sgt. Pepper* I really liked called 'A Day in the Life.' It was a beautiful song and then this strange sound like John Cale would make (he told me it was an orchestra, actually) and then this stupid little pop song that spoils everything so far. I told this to Paul, and I made a mistake, because the beautiful song was written by John Lennon and the stupid song was written by Paul." As quoted in Ritchie Unterberger, *White Light/White Heat: The Velvet Underground Day by Day* (London: Jawbone, 2009), 151. Assuming Nico's account is true it probably did not endear the Velvets to the Beatles—or at least McCartney.

11. The guitars and bass are tuned down a half-step, sounding a half-step lower on the recording (i.e., G♯-D♯ instead of A-E in the verses).

12. Cale produced the eponymous debut album by the Stooges in 1969, and provided a similar dissonant, monotonal piano part or "pulse" on the proto-punk classic "I Wanna Be Your Dog." The song's repeated G-F♯-E main riff entailed that the piano would fall inevitably fall in and out of tune with the band.

13. "The Gift" is sometimes believed to be "Booker T." (in honor of Booker T. and the MGs), an instrumental jam the Velvets performed live but never recorded in the studio. Based on the live version included on *Peel Slowly and See*, "Booker T." follows a standard 12-bar blues structure, whereas "The Gift" is anchored by a one-bar bass riff repeated throughout the song. In other words, if "The Gift" is "Booker T." it is a radically revised or, more correctly, reduced version of it.

14. "The place of sexual life is humanly delineated by a prohibition: sexual life is never unswervingly free; it must always be confined by the bounds customs set…. The absence of prohibition would have only one meaning: that *animality* which men are conscious of having left behind, and to which we cannot aspire to return. But it is another matter to deny that abhorrence of nature … another matter to comply with the *judgments* that ordinarily accompany the prohibitions." Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Volume II: The History of Eroticism*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone, 1993), 23–4. Emphasis original.

15. *Coldness and Cruelty*, 134.

16. As quoted in Bill Brown, *Words and Guitar: A History of Lou Reed's Music* (Brooklyn: Colossal, 2014), 22–3.

17. As quoted in Brown, 23.

18. The Velvets has an endorsement deal with Vox at the time, and were using Vox amplifiers as well as other Vox products. On "Sister Ray," Cale

played a Vox Continental organ, the preferred organ brand for many garage-rock bands of the era.

19. *Coldness and Cruelty*, 33–4.

20. In this respect, see Hegarty, *Noise/Music*, 124. As far as the relationship between noise and power, Hegarty suggests noise contains potentially masochistic or sadistic elements but the key is that "Noise might be the opening of desire, or the erotic, but it has to suspend it—no release, just a sudden end when it stops." While suspension figures more overtly on "Venus in Furs," the interminable aural battery of "Sister Ray" offers "no release" whereas the verse-chorus structure of "Venus in Furs" offers transitional release points or "breaks" between the suspensions *within* the verses and choruses.

21. *Noise*, 28.

### *Chapter 13*

1. As quoted in liner notes to The Velvet Underground, *Peel Slowly and See* (5 CD box set; Polydor 314 527 887–2, 1995).

2. See *Please Kill Me*, 23–4.

3. Pat Thomas, "Interview with Doug Yule," *Perfect Sound Forever* (on-line music journal). Archived at: http://www.furious.com/perfect/yule.html. Accessed: October 4, 2014.

4. Ron Jovanovic, *Seeing the Light: Inside the Velvet Underground* (New York: Macmillan, 2012), 138. The original European vinyl release used the Valentin mix, as did subsequent CD re-releases. However, the *Peel Slowly and See* box set used the closet mix, which is to say the mix as Reed intended it rather than the record company and thus preserving Reed's "artistic vision" over industry demands.

5. Despite the official break with Warhol the previous year, the front cover was a group photo of the band at the Factory with a smiling Reed looking at the camera holding an obscured copy of *Harper's Bazaar* (the October 1968 issue), indicating the band was still indeed associating with Warhol although no longer affiliated professionally.

6. As quoted in Richard Witts, *Nico: The Life and Lies of an Icon* (London: Virgin, 1995), 228.

7. Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1994), 308.

8. Ibid.

9. A promotional film for "Evening of Light" was made in 1969 and directed by François de Menil. The video features Nico and, among others, a shirtless Iggy Pop in mime make-up. Nico and her entourage tote a large wooden cross through a barren field strewn with manikin and doll body parts before the cross is ritually burned. To be sure, at one level the cross burning suggests the rituals of white supremacists and the Ku Klux Klan which becomes especially problematic given Nico's alleged fascist sympathies. However, a burning cross was used in Scotland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as an alert signal of impending warfare (*crann tara* translated as "fiery cross"). Given the interpretation of "Evening of Light" as about World War III, the war symbolism of a burning cross is utilized in the promotional film for "Evening of Light."

10. Bangs, *Mainlines*, 207. In this context, Bangs' critical position is frequently misunderstood. In that he championed the Velvets and the Stooges while openly despising genres like progressive rock and jazz-rock fusion, Bangs is frequently considered a traditionalist, anti-"art rock" critic. In fact, Bangs was a staunch supporter of free jazz (Albert Ayler, etc.) and avant-rock (Brian Eno, post-punk, No Wave). In a 1969 *Rolling Stone* rave review of *Trout Mask Replica* Bangs hailed Captain Beefheart as "the only true Dadaist in rock." In turn, Bangs dismissed Frank Zappa as "a despicable wretch morons call 'composer' instead of 'rip-off artist'" [Lester

Bangs, *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, ed. Greil Marcus (New York: Anchor, 2003), 375].

11. Here one could also consider Antony and the Johnson's live record *Cut the World* (2012), featuring transgender "chamber pop" artist Antony Hegarty performing his songs with the Danish National Chamber Orchestra.

12. One of the lingering debates around Nico was that her alleged sympathies with fascism and incidents of racist or anti-Semitic comments or behavior; see Simon Reynolds, "From the Velvets to the Void" *The Guardian* (March 14, 2007). Archived at: http://www.theguardian.com/music/2007/mar/16/popandrock3. Accessed: February 26, 2015. Witts argued that Nico's politics were more nihilistic than Nazi, albeit highly informed by Nietzsche or, crude readings of Nietzsche as a celebration rather than critique of domination (see *Nico: The Life and Lies of an Icon*, 73–5).

13. Adorno, "Commitment," 314.

14. In 1970, MGM released a double-album Velvet's compilation culled from the first three albums, *Andy Warhol's Velvet Underground featuring Nico* which also included a Warhol painting of red lips not so much drinking but performing fellatio on a Coca-Cola bottle. Despite Warhol and Nico not being involved on most of the album, it indicates the extent that MGM/Verve saw the market potential around Warhol and, to a lesser extent, Nico rather than the Velvets.

15. Thomas, op. cit. Morrison admitted his distancing himself from the band stemmed from lingering animosity over Cale's dismissal, the temporary loss of Tucker, and the demands of completing his undergraduate studies in English Literature at City College of New York while he also played with the Velvets.

16. *Seeing the Light*, 156.

17. As quoted in Jovanovic, 171.

18. The change in musical direction was also articulated on the front cover, a Pop Art painting of pinkish fumes rising out a subway entrance/exit, which is to say something "pretty" emitting from the underbelly of New York City as opposed to *VU and Nico* and *WL/WH*.

19. These songs were popularized on Reed's live album *Rock 'N' Roll Animal* (1974), documenting the "glam era" Reed performing as a lead singer sans guitar in extended hard rock workouts. Reed's band on the album later backed Alice Cooper.

20. From 1976–8, Doug Yule was a member of American Flyer, a country-rock group that released two albums on United Artists.

***Conclusion***

1. Zappa's interview is archived at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZazEM8cgt0. Accessed: April 4, 2015.

2. *The End of the American Avant-Garde*, 123.

3. *Coming Apart*, 294.

4. While Pink Floyd made multi-media a staple of their concerts, by the release of their highly successful *The Dark Side of the Moon* (1973) they abandoned much of the avant-grade musical excursions and improvisations in favor of replicating the studio versions of songs in concert. David Gilmour recounted, "Exploring live in front of an audience like we did in the '60s and very early '70s, you make as many mistakes as you get things right. A lot of it was awful" (as quoted in Macan, 161).

5. "America" was intended as an "instrumental protest song" and Emerson punctuated the point by burning an American flag onstage during a performance of the song at the Royal Albert Hall on June 26, 1968. It resulted in a national controversy, earning the Nice a lifetime ban from the venue although it was lifted for ELP.

6. Paul Hegarty argued that early progressive rock sought to challenge rock conventions and audiences, although by the early 1970s prog-rock succumbed to bloated, complicated songs emphasizing virtuoso musicianship, extended solos, doggerel lyrics, and an obsession with musical technology (i.e., synthesizers, effects, studio composition); particularly in the classic line-up era (1973–4), King Crimson was one of the few "progressive " bands that became more avant-garde during the early 1970s in their nexus of heavy metal, free jazz, and modern classical foregrounding improvisation (see *Noise/Music*, 80). In the case of Jethro Tull, Ian Anderson claimed the band's two extended concept albums, *Thick as a Brick* (1971) and *A Passion Play* (1973) contained a great deal of comedy and satire of the emerging excesses of prog-rock that were taken quite seriously. A band like Gentle Giant rivaled Frank Zappa in terms of song complexity and virtuosity as demonstrated on *The Power and the Glory* (1974) and *Free Hand* (1975) although their assemblages of multiple genres from rock, pop, soul, medieval music, jazz, and classical music could tend towards pastiche despite the impressive compositions and performances.

7. *Noise*, 109.

8. In this respect, Can became a crucial avant-rock band. Formed in Germany in the late 1960s, Irmin Schmidt (keyboards) and Holger Czulkay (bass) were two former students of Stockhausen working in modern classical music and joined forces with a jazz drummer (Jaki Liebezeit), a young rock guitarist/violinist (Michael Karoli), and an African American expatriate soul singer (Malcolm Mooney). Naming the band Can, their debut album *Monster Movie* (1969) combined the minimalist drive of the Velvets with the space rock of Pink Floyd into what became known as Krautrock, a genre favoring "motorik" drumming and simple, repetitive bass lines anchoring extended interplay of often dissonant guitar and keyboards while vocals tended towards chants to sporadic non-verbal sounds.

9. A direct connection between 1960s avant-rock and the 1970s avant-rock of post-punk was manifest in when Mayo Thompson, guitarist/vocalist for

Red Krayola, became a staff producer for Rough Trade Records and later joined Pere Ubu, one of the leading post-punk bands.

10. Michael Gallope, "Why Was This Music Desirable? On a Critical Explanation of the Avant-Garde," *The Journal of Musicology*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2014): 208.

11. "One Culture and the New Sensibility" in *Against Interpretation*, 304–5. It bears noting that Sontag, writing in 1965, is referring to the mop-top era Beatles. Her assessment becomes more applicable as far as the post-*Sgt. Pepper* "counterculture" and "modernist" Beatles.

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# List of Names and Terms

*Abbey Road*

Abnucleas Emuuka Electric Symphony Orchestra

*Absolutely Free*

Adorno, Theodor W.

Allen, Steve

Altamont

*American Bandstand*

Antonioni, Michelangelo

Apollinaire, Guillaume

Apple Corps

Apple Records

Arcade Fire

Aronowitz, Al

Artaud, Antonin

*Arturo Ui*

Asian Music Circle

Attali, Jacques

Authoritarianism

Avant-garde/experimental music

Ayler, Albert

Babbitt, Milton

Bach, Johann Sebastian

Baker, Ginger

Bakunin, Mikhail

Bangs, Lester

Baraka, Amiri (a.k.a. LeRoi Jones)

*Barb*

Barnes, Mike

Barnett, Anthony

Barrett, Syd

Barrow, Tony

Beach Boys

Beatlemania

Beatles

*The Beatles*

*The Beatles* (ABC cartoon show)

Beckett, Samuel

Bed-Ins

Benjamin, Walter

Berg, Alban

Berkeley, Busby

Berry, Chuck

Bieber, Justin

Binginheimer, Rodney

Bizarre Productions

Bizarre Records

Black, Jimmy Carl

*Blow Job*

Blue Thumb Records

Blues

Bockris, Victor

Bono

Booker T. and the M.G.s

Boston, Mark (a.k.a. “Rockette Morton”)

Bowie, David

Brackett, David

Brando, Marlon

Brecht, Bertolt

Brown, James

Browne, David

Browne, Jackson

Browne, Tara

Brubeck, Dave

Bruce, Lenny

Buckley, Tim

Buddah Records

Buff, Paul

Buffalo Springfield

Buñuel, Luis

Bürger, Peter

*Burnt Weeny Sandwich*

Burroughs, William S.

Café au Go Go

Café Bizarre

Cage, John

Cale, John

Calinescu, Matei

Can

Capitalism

Capitol Records

Captain Beefheart

Carlin, Peter Ames

Carroll, Lewis

Chandler, Gene

Chandler, Raymond

Chaplin, Charlie

*Chelsea Girl*

*Chelsea Girls*

Christgau, Robert

*Chunga's Revenge*

Clapton, Eric

Clark, Dick

Clark, T.J.

The Clash

Classical music

Coates, Norma

Cobain, Kurt

Cody, “Buffalo Bill”

Cohen, Herb

Cohen, Lisa

Cold War

Coleman, Ornette

Collins, Ray

Communism

Concept albums

Concerts

Conservatism

Consumerism

Cooke, Richard

Cooper, Alice

Copland, Aaron

Cotton, Jeff (a.k.a. “Antennae Jimmy Semens”)

Counterculture

Courrier, Kevin

Cowell, Henry

Cream

*Creem*

Crocker, Chris

Crowley, Alistair

*Cruising with Ruben & the Jets*

Cult value

Culture Industry

Curved Air

Cutler, Ivor

Cutrone, Ronnie

Cyrus, Miley

Dada

Darling, Candy

*David Frost Show*

Davis, Miles

de Gaulle, Charles

Deleuze, Gilles

Delville, Michel

Democratic National Convention (1968)

Denver, John

Descartes, René

Desnos, Robert

Diddley, Bo

DiLello, Richard

Dirty Mac

Dissonance

Dolph, Norman

Dolphy, Eric

Donovan

Doo-wop

The Doors

Dot Records

*Down Beat*

Duncan, Cleveland

Dylan, Bob

Eastman, John

Eastman, Lee

*Ed Sullivan Show*

Ehernzwing, Anton

Eisenstein, Sergei

Elgar, Sir Edward

Eliot, T.S.

Ellington, Duke

Ellis, Don

Emerick, Geoff

Emerson, Eric

Emerson, Keith

Emerson, Lake and Palmer (ELP)

EMI Records

*Empire*

Epstein, Brian

Ernst, Max

Estrada, Roy

Evans, Mal

Everett, Walter

Everly Brothers

Exhibition-value

Exploding Plastic Inevitable (EPI)

Factory (Warhol)

Fallon, Larry

Fascism

Fellini, Federico

Femininity

Fields, W. C.

Fillmore West

*The Firebird*

Fischer, (Larry) Wild Man

Five Satins

Flaming Lips

Fluxus

Folk music

The Four Seasons

The 14 Hour Technicolor Dream festival

*Freak Out!*

Free jazz

Frees, Paul

French, John (a.k.a. “Drumbo”)

Freud, Sigmund

Fricke, David

Frith, Fred

Frith, Simon

Frost, David

*The Frost Programme*

Fugs

Futurism

Gair, Christopher

Gallope, Michael

Games for May (Pink Floyd concert)

Gang of Four

Gardner, Bunk

Garrick Theater (Mothers' concerts)

Generation Gap/generational politics

Genesis

Gentle Giant

Gershwin, George

*Get Back* sessions

Ginsberg, Allen

Gitlis, Ivry

Glass, Phillip

Gloag, Kenneth

Godard, Jean-Luc

Goodwin, Andrew

Graham, Bill

Grateful Dead

*The Great Dictator*

GTOs

Guevara, Che

Gwar

Hamilton, Richard

Handel, George Frideric

Happenings

*A Hard Day's Night* (film)

Hardin, Tim

Harkleroad, Bill (a.k.a. "Zoot Horn Rollo")

Harmolodics

Harris, Don “Sugarcane”

Harrison, George

Harvard, Joe

Hayden, Victor (a.k.a. “the Mascara Snake”)

*Head*

The Heartbeats

Heath, Edward

Hegarty, Paul

*Help!* (film)

Hendrix, Jimi

*Hey Jude*

Historical avant-garde

Hitler, Adolf

Hobbs, Stuart D.

Hoffman, Abbie

Holly, Buddy

The Hollywood Persuaders

Holocaust

Homosexuality

*Hot Rats*

*How I Won the War*

Howe, Irving

Humphrey, Hubert

Huxley, Aldous

Huyssen, Andreas

Hybrid music

*The Iliad*

*Imitation of Christ*

Indian music

Infantilism

Ingber, Elliot

*I've Got a Secret*

Ives, Charles

Jackson, Lee

Jagger, Mick

Jameson, Fredric

Jazz

*Jazz & Pop*

Jefferson Airplane

Jethro Tull

Johns, Jasper

Johnson, Lyndon Baines

Jones, Davy

Joplin, Janis

Jovanovic, Ron

Joyce, James

Kabuki

Kafka, Franz

Kart, Larry

Keller, Hans

Kellgren, Gary

Kennedy, John F.

Kennedy, Robert F.

Kenney, Beverly

Kesey, Ken

King, B.B.

King, Martin Luther, Jr.

King Crimson

*King Lear*

Kinks

*Kiss*

Klee, Paul

Klein, Allen

Kramer, Wayne

Krasnow, Bob

Kunc, Dick

Laboe, Art

Lady Gaga

Landau, Jon

Lane, John R.

Laurel and Hardy

Leary, Timothy

The Leaves

Leibniz, G.W

Lenin, V.I

Lennon, John

Leppert, Richard

Lester, Richard

*Let It Be* (album)

*Let It Be* (film)

Lewis, Jerry Lee

Liberal democracy

Liberalism

Liberation News Service (LNS)

Licata, John

Ligeti, Gryögy

Lightfoot, Gordon

Lindsay-Hogg, Michael

Little Richard

*Live Peace in Toronto 1969*

*Loaded*

Lockwood, Sir John

Lombardo, Sal

Lowe, Kelly Fischer

*Lumpy Gravy*

Lydon, John

MacDonald, Ian

MacLise, Angus

Madras, Yanni “Magic Alex”

Magic Band

*The Magic Christian*

*Magical Mystery Tour* (BBC special)

*Magical Mystery Tour* (U.S. album)

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

Malanga, Gerald

Man Ray

Manson, Charles

Mao Tse-tung

Mao Zedong

*The Marble Index*

Marches

Marcus, Greil

Marker, Gary “Magic”

Marquis de Sade

Martin, George

Marx, Karl/Marxism

Marx Brothers

Masochism

Mason, David

Mason, Nick

Mass culture

Mass music

Maximalism

MC5

McCartney, Paul

The Medallions

Merzbow

Messiaen, Oliver

MGM/Verve Records

Miles, Barry

Miller, Glenn

Million Volt Light and Sound Rave

*Milton Berle Show*

Minimalism

Mitchell, Mitch

Mix, Tom

Modernism

Modernity

Monkees

*The Monkees* (TV show)

Monks

Monroe, Marilyn

Moody Blues

Moon, Keith

Moore, Suzanne

Mop-top Beatles (era)

MOR

Morrison, Jim

Morrison, Sterling

Morrissey, Paul

*Mothermania*

Mothers of Invention

Multi-media

Mundi, Billy

Music hall

Music of alienation

*Musique concrète*

Nature

Neo-avant-garde

Nesmith, Mike

New Left

*New Left Review*

*New Musical Express*

New Wave (music)

*Newsweek*

The Nice

Nico (Christa Päffgen)

Night Ranger

1910 Fruitgum Company

Nixon, Richard

“No Commercial Potential” (Zappa Project/Object)

Noise

Nono, Luigi

Norris, Andrew

Northcutt, William F.

Nyman, Michael

Objectivist music

Ohio Express

Oldham, Andrew Loog

O'List, Davy

*One World*

O'Neill, William L.

Ono, Yoko

Orientalism

Original Sound (record label)

Oswald, Lee Harvey

Otis, Shuggie

Page, Jimmy

Pal Recording Studio (PRS)

Pandora's Box riot

Parody

Pastiche

Penderecki, Krzysztof

The Penguins

Percival, Lance

The Persuasions

Pettet, Rosebud

Picasso, Pablo

Pickwick Records

Pink Floyd

Plasmatics

Plastic Ono Band

Poe, Edgar Allan

Pollack, Jackson

Pop, Iggy

Pop Art

Popular culture

Popular music

Postmodernism

Post-punk

Practical conservatism

Presley, Elvis

Preston, Billy

Preston, Don

Pretty Things

Primitives

Progressive rock

Project/Object

Promotional films

Pseudo-rebellion

Punk rock

Pynchon, Thomas

Question Mark and the Mysterians

*Ramparts*

Ratledge, Mike

*Ready Steady Go!*

Reagan, Ronald

Red Krayola

Redding, Otis

Reed, Ishmael

Reed, Lou

Repressive Hypothesis

*Revolver*

Richards, Keith

Riley, Terry

*The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*

*The Rite of Spring*

Robins, Jessie

*Rock and Roll Circus* (a.k.a. *The Rolling Stones Rock and Roll Circus*)

Roessner, Jeffery

*Rolling Stone*

Rolling Stones

Rotten, Johnny

Rousseau, Henri

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques

*Rubber Soul*

*Run Home, Slow*

Sade

Sadism

Sadomasochism

Sales, Soupy

Satie, Erik

Schoenberg, Arnold

Schwartz, Delmore

Second Viennese School

Sedgwick, Edie

Selby, Hubert, Jr.

Selico, Ron

Sennett, Mack

Serling, Rod

Sesnick, Steve

Sex Pistols

Sexual revolution/repression

*Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*

Shaggs

Shankar, Ravi

Sherman, Bobby

Sherwood, Jim "Motorhead"

The Shields

Shock effect

Sibelius, Jean

Silver Apples

Simon and Garfunkel

Sinatra, Nancy

*Sing Out!*

Situationist International

*Sleep*

Smothers, Tom

*The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*

Soft Machine

Sonic Youth

Sontag, Susan

Soots

Soviet Union/U.S.S.R

Spector, Phil

Spinetti, Victor

Springsteen, Bruce

Stalin, Joseph

Starkey, Maureen

Starr, Ringo

*Steve Allen Show*

Stevens, John

Stockhausen, Karlheinz

Stooges

Straight Records

Stravinsky, Igor

Studio composition

Supremes

Surf music

Surfaris

Surrealism

Surrealist music

Suzy Creamcheese

Talking Heads

Taylor, Cecil

Tchaikovsky, Pyotor

Tchicai, John

Tetragrammaton Records

Theater of Cruelty

Theater of Eternal Music

Theoretical music

Third Reich

13th Floor Elevators

Thomas, Chris

*The Threepenny Opera*

*Time*

Tonality

*Top of the Pops*

Toronto Rock and Roll Revival

Track Records

Troggs

*Trout Mask Replica*

Trudeau, Pierre

Truman, Harry S.

Tucker, Maureen “Moe”

Turner, Ike

Turner, Tina

Twain, Mark

Tzara, Tristan

*Uncle Meat*

Underwood, Ian

*Unfinished Music No. 1: Two Virgins*

*Unfinished Music No. 2: Life with the Lions*

United Artists

United States of America (band)

Valentin, Val

van den Berg, Hubert

Van der Graaf Generator

van der Rohe, Ludwig Miles

Van Vliet, Don

Varèse, Edgard

vaudeville

Vega, Alan

Velvet Underground

*The Velvet Underground*

*The Velvet Underground and Nico*

Vietnam

Vincent, Gene

von Sacher-Masoch, Leopold

Voorman, Klaus

Walley, David

Warhol, Andy

Waters, Muddy

Waters, Roger

Watson, Ben

Watson, Steven

Watts Riots

Watts, Charlie

*We're Only in It for the Money*

*Weasels Ripped My Flesh*

Webern, Anton

*Wedding Album*

Weill, Kurt

Weiner, John

Wells, H.G.

West, Kanye

*West Side Story*

White, Alan

*The White Album*

*White Light/White Heat*

Whitman, Walt

The Who

Williams, Danny

Williams, Hank

Williams, Kenny

Williams, Ronnie

Wilson, Harold

Wilson, Tom

Winner, Langdon

Womack, Kenneth

Wood, Michael

World War I

World War II

World War III

Woronov, Mary

Wragg, David

Wright, Rick

Wyatt, Robert

Xenakis, Iannis

*Yellow Submarine* (album)

*Yellow Submarine* (film)

Yes

Young, La Monte

Yule, Billy

Yule, Doug

Zappa, Frank

Zarubica, Pamela